

JEWISH AFFAIRS

Chanukah 2017



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JEWISH AFFAIRS

MISSION

In publishing JEWISH AFFAIRS, the SA Jewish Board of Deputies aims to produce a cultural forum which caters for a wide variety of interests in the community. The journal will be a vehicle for the publication of articles of significant thought and opinion on contemporary Jewish issues, and will aim to encourage constructive debate, in the form of reasoned and researched essays, on all matters of Jewish and general interest.

JEWISH AFFAIRS aims also to publish essays of scholarly research on all subjects of Jewish interest, with special emphasis on aspects of South African Jewish life and thought. Scholarly research papers that make an original contribution to their chosen field of enquiry will be submitted to the normal processes of academic refereeing before being accepted for publication.

JEWISH AFFAIRS will promote Jewish cultural and creative achievement in South Africa, and consider Jewish traditions and heritage within the modern context. It aims to provide future researchers with a window on the community's reaction to societal challenges. In this way the journal hopes critically to explore, and honestly to confront, problems facing the Jewish community both in South Africa and abroad, by examining national and international affairs and their impact on South Africa.

The SA Jewish Board of Deputies is committed to dialogue and free enquiry. It aims to protect human rights and to strive for better relations among peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds in South Africa.

The columns of JEWISH AFFAIRS will therefore be open to all shades of opinion. The views expressed by the contributors will be their own, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editor, the Editorial Board or the Publishers.

However, in keeping with the provisions of the National Constitution, the freedom of speech exercised in this journal will exclude the dissemination of hate propaganda, personal attacks or invective, or any material which may be regarded as defamatory or malicious. In all such matters, the Editor's decision is final.

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COVER IMAGE

“A discussion of the Talmud” by Carl Schleicher.

(See pp 41-44 in this issue)



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JEWISH AFFAIRS

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Editor: David Saks

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CAN JEWISH CIVILIZATION SAVE THE WEST?

*

Chuck Volpe

Abstract

The West is in retreat, if not in decline. The free and democratic world so dearly achieved, can no longer be taken for granted. If hope lies anywhere, it lies with the people who despite the fact that they suffered more than any other group in the Second World War, today hold the flag of freedom and hope highest. Call it what you will – God, fate or chance – the Jewish people have an unrivalled prescription for individual and collective flourishing. Can Jewish civilisation save the West?

Introduction

In November 2015, the American Jewish magazine *Commentary* devoted an entire edition to the subject of *The Jewish Future*. They asked 69 prominent Jews from every walk of life – religion, politics, academia, the arts, even then world chess champion Garry Kasparov – to write a page on how they saw the Jewish world fifty years on, in 2065. I read through the magazine carefully, and while I found no consensus (could there possibly have been amongst Jews?), there were three points of substantial agreement: a) Israel would be okay (there where many threats, but Israel would face them down), b) religious Jews in the Diaspora would be okay (their faith would sustain them as it had for 100s of years), and c), and here's the problem, non-religious Diaspora Jews would continue to assimilate in ever increasing numbers.

The prospect of losing more Jews through assimilation really bothered me, and I felt a responsibility to do something even if in a small way, by trying a different tack. I started by asking myself two questions:

1. Do these Jews realise what they're giving up?
2. Do they know what they're getting in exchange?

Chuck Volpe, a regular contributor to *Jewish Affairs*, is a former Port Elizabeth-based businessman and Jewish communal leader now living in Australia. This article is adapted from a paper he presented at Limmud Oz in June 2017.

This paper is an attempt to answer these two questions. In view of how big the subject is, it is intended as being a tentative, exploratory essay aimed at promoting further thinking and discussion.

I will start with a few comments about the assimilating Jew before looking at Western civilisation and some of its problems. Then, by way of contrast, I will present a view of Jewish civilisation in the hope of convincing the reader that not only is it “a light unto the nations”, but a light unto Jews too. Too often, Jews themselves are blind to this light.

I myself am not a religious Jew in the conventional sense of going to shul regularly or laying tefillin, but I am deeply aware of my Jewish heritage and with the passing of time, this awareness continues to deepen. When I think of its span across almost all of recorded history, its survival and phenomenal achievements, it seemed to me that the assimilating Jew in his quest for greener pastures is giving up gold bullion for ‘piepkes’. It makes no sense.

I can understand, with a push, how Jews, having been cloistered in ghettos for centuries and wishing to take advantage of the opportunities during the *Haskalah*, crossed the bridge to foreign cultures in the belief that their lives would be improved. But today, that bridge leads to a wilderness devoid of values and antithetical to a better life. The two options stand in the starkest contrast imaginable. I'm speaking about a life of maximal fulfilment, supported by the values of family, community and the collective wisdom gathered from three and half thousand years of ruminating on what makes a good life.

The assimilating Jew appears could be likened to a new kind of ‘wandering Jew’, one who wanders blindly from his promised land back to Egypt. Three thousand years after his forebears arrived, he decides to return to the wilderness, taking with him, in imaginary procession, his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Before I elaborate on this metaphorical Egypt, let me state a few definitions. When I refer to ‘the West’ or Western Civilisation, it primarily signifies the ‘Old West’ i.e. Europe, even though much of what I deal with also applies to the ‘New West’, the United States, Canada and Australia. I use the term ‘Jewish

civilisation' to mean the entire Jewish world – Judaism, its texts, Jewish culture, values, history, psychology, aspirations, the notion of Jewish peoplehood and nation, and being a 'light unto the nations'. Jewish civilisation in this sense is greater than any one part or combination of parts.

The soul of the West: Two confrontations

Eighty years ago, the West was confronted by two cataclysms – the first was the all-out war against the Nazis and the second was the Holocaust. Why separate these two events, one might wonder? After all, they both occurred at the same time. I do so because each represented a different kind of threat, with a different outcome.

The war against the Nazis was a threat to the body of the West, a physical threat, involving physical resources like tanks, planes and soldiers. The Holocaust was different. While it was a physical threat to the Jews, in fact, it was a catastrophe to the West – a threat against its soul, ethical values and how it saw itself. In the physical confrontation, the Western Allies were victorious, but in respect of the Holocaust, the West failed to address the threat, and it may yet prove to have rendered a mortal blow.

The West was forced to recognise that at the very heart of its civilisation lay a brutal paradox: that the civilisation that could produce Mozart and Goethe, Kepler and Heisenberg, could also produce the Commandant of Auschwitz, a man who operated a gas chamber during the day and wept over Mozart and Goethe at night.

I list here only German names, but it wasn't just the Germans who brought about the Holocaust. Every country in Europe, with the exception of the Danes and possibly the Bulgarians, played a role. So pervasive was this collective involvement that new usages for the words perpetrator, collaborator, onlooker, appeared in the dictionary to describe their various roles. "What did you do in the war daddy?" became a much-feared question, one which still reverberates not just in individual minds, but collective minds too.

The West had looked in a proverbial mirror and seen its own depravity, and ironically, it was the very group who for centuries had been persecuted by the forebears of those perpetrators, collaborators and onlookers who had held up that mirror. Some of the West's most sacred beliefs had to be revised – the belief that culture and learning would humanise man, and the belief in human progress, that the world was progressing towards a better place. The one belief that gained traction was the belief in a karmic destiny.

Damaged and demoralised

Like people, civilisations have inner lives. One can refer to the soul of a nation or a people or civilisation. This soul encompasses a civilisation's identity and self-concept, its source of thought, feeling and action and what it stands for. It has a strong moral aspect too, which serves to constitute that civilisation as 'having worth' and that in turn motivates its members to want to preserve and defend it. When civilisations lose that sense of worth, decline is not far off.

In his celebrated *History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell speaks of great civilisations containing the seeds of their own destruction:

What ... happened in the great age of Greece happened again in Renaissance Italy: History of Western Philosophy traditional moral restraints disappeared ... [and]... the decay of morals made Italians collectively impotent, and they fell, like the Greeks, under the Dominion of nations less civilised than themselves but not so destitute of social cohesion.¹

Robin Shepherd, a political commentator and analyst is more graphic in his description:

... European civilisation [has been weakened] by the legacy of its momentous and terrible past; devoid of believable ideals; cracked by self-loathing; fatally deficient in the world even to defend itself; hedonistic, materialistic, relativistic, pacifistic; puffed up, and lazy; complacent, and defeatist. It is an image of a continent bereft of the ability to make serious judgements about matters of consequence.²

This is an awful depiction, but is it true, and if so, to what extent is it true? Well, 'terrible past' is certainly true and being 'devoid of believable ideals' is also true. But especially concerning is what Shepherd has to say about the inability to defend itself: 'fatally deficient... even to defend itself', 'pacifistic', 'lazy', 'complacent', and 'defeatist'.

When Germany attacked Britain in 1940, Winston Churchill rallied the Brits to the defence of the realm. "You do your worst and we will do our best", he boomed addressing Hitler on behalf of the British. He knew that the Brits would rise to the clarion call for collective action. They did; but that was then.

In 2015 a survey found that the majority of Brits would no longer fight for their country. Only 27% said they would defend the realm if called upon to do so. The

situation elsewhere in Europe was even worse. The figure in Spain was 21%, in Italy 20%, in Germany, a country once defined by martial values, it was 18%. Vladimir Putin, for one, understood this. In 2014, the Russians marched into Crimea and soon after into eastern Ukraine. Now there is talk of a threat to the Baltic States. Putin had done a quick comparison in respect of his own country. He knew that most of his countrymen – 59% – would be willing to fight for Russia. In China the figure is even higher, at 71%. This is deeply worrying. It appears that Europe has lost its will and the belief that it has something worth defending. The morally-sapping guilt for the Holocaust is one reason, but there is more.

A terrible past - an uncertain future

In the 75 years prior to 1945, Europe fought three progressively savage wars – the Franco-Prussian War, the First World War and the Second World War.

These conflicts, effectively civil wars, were the result of rampant nationalism. By 1945, the countries of Europe were exhausted and terrified by what they had wrought, and no country more so than Germany. Like exhausted boxers drained of energy and the will to fight, they went into a clinch, desperately holding on to one another. This joining together into what became known as the European Union came about not because it was a good thing, but because they feared worse. This abdication of national sovereignty in favour of an amorphous unity had the result of erasing national identities, a vital component of social cohesion and common purpose.

Nationalism comes in different forms. Nazi Germany represented the jingoistic, fanatical and narrow form. But nationalism can also take the form of patriotism, loyalty and public spiritedness. These features play a vital role in creating identity, meaning and purpose, and the sense of belonging to a community of value. When this is lost, confusion and anarchy reign. In the words of Robin Shepherd the young, lacking a higher purpose, become hedonistic, materialistic, pacifistic, and complacent. Britain's vote to leave the European Union is an attempt to remedy this.

It is said that the future is notoriously difficult to predict, but one way of doing so is to look at fertility rates, i.e. the number of babies per woman. The theory is that no one brings a child into a world they don't believe in or value. If this is true, it follows that a high fertility rate indicates an optimistic view of the future and a low rate the opposite. The standard replacement

rate is 2.1 and anything above or below tells a story.

In the European Union today the average fertility rate is 1.6 - well below the replacement rate. In Italy and Spain, Catholic countries which in the past had high birth rates, the rate today is an astounding 1.2. For the record, Germany has the lowest birth rate in the world. Furthermore, the rate is dropping and there are grave doubts that it can be arrested.

By contrast, the fertility rate in America is 2.1 and in Israel it is 3.08% which is the highest fertility rate in the developed world. This is not only the work or the pleasure of religious Jews; the rate for secular Jews is 2.8%.

Low fertility rates cause other problems. The next generation (of fewer people) will have to bear the massive social security costs of the present aging generation. Furthermore, there is no one to do the work so migrants have to be brought in. These migrants, largely from Muslim countries, have created new problems which I will not go into here. While many have integrated, a significant number have not and cannot change their beliefs or way of life. As the Roman poet Horace once said: they change their skies, not their souls, who run across the sea.³

The crisis of liberalism

I want to deal with something which in many respects lies at the heart of Europe's problems today, and that is the crisis of liberalism. What I am referring to here is not liberalism in the old sense, by which is meant generosity of spirit, tolerance of others, commitment to the rule of law, the love of freedom and the value and dignity of all men. I'm referring to the dogmatic political ideology of the liberal left today, an ideology whose vision and practices are taken from the failed socialist and Marxist utopias of the 19th Century.

There is a reason which explains how these utopias managed to survive into the 21st Century. When the two totalitarian regimes of the 20th Century – Nazism and Communism – collapsed, they were not dealt with in the same way. There was a thorough reckoning only in respect of Nazism. During the Nuremberg Trials all the evil of this diabolical regime was brought into the light of day to be examined, catalogued and acknowledged for the evil they were and for the massive bloodshed they caused.

But there was no such reckoning with Communism and its fellow utopian ideologies. When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 there was no Nuremberg, nor was there an acknowledgement that this ideology with its

promised utopias had brought death to 100 million people. Its power to intoxicate and mislead the millions of ‘useful idiots’ as Lenin called them, was hardly examined, with the result that these utopian ghosts still stalk the corridors of Western politics. Their new acolytes are the liberal-left, who will henceforth be referred to as ‘liberals’.

The liberal today is a good person - we know this because he tells us. He parades his goodness in conversation and on his T-shirt and placard. His support for what he perceives as the right and the good, however, is not based on a reasoned position but on impulse. One could call him a ‘passionate ethicist’, with the emphasis on passionate because his ethics are based purely on emotion. Ethical discussions employing reason and argument are a waste of time; what counts for him is feeling and he is overflowing with that, generally of the righteous variety. He discards Descartes’s Enlightenment credo of “I think therefore I am” and replaces it with “I feel therefore I am”. In other words, if it feels right, it must be right. So sure is he of his feelings, that in defence of his faith, he wields emotion like a club, beating up on people who, as he puts it: “have no compassion”. He is a true believer, the practitioner of a new religion.

To understand why I refer to it as a religion, one has to delve into the history of utopian theory. When religious belief started to wane in the middle of the 18th Century, people still needed something to hang onto which would give them security and a belief in the future that religion had once done. Socialism and Marxism later stepped in to fill the gap with their new secular versions of utopia; they took their ideas straight from Christianity, which 2000 years before had taken them from prophetic Judaism.

Judaism is a religion of the Law, as is Islam. Christianity is not. When Christianity broke from Judaism it appropriated the Hebrew Prophets but repealed the Law. This gave Christianity the advantage of being less onerous and more appealing. No less appealing were the utopian ideas of the Prophets, ideas such as ‘the end of days’ when the ‘lion will lie down with the lamb’ and ‘the brotherhood of all men’. These feel-good ideas may be innocuous when spouted on a street corner, but as a political ideology they can be deadly dangerous.

For this reason, Judaism has always handled the Prophets with kid gloves. ‘Prophetic Judaism’ and ‘Rabbinic Judaism’ represent two unequal poles, with Rabbinic Judaism the stronger. In order to mediate the siren call of the Prophets, they were always studied together with the law of Rabbinic Judaism. One might say that Rabbinic Judaism was the

ballast that kept the ship of Judaism upright.

The problem today is that liberalism has no check on these utopian enthusiasms. Liberals may be appalled to hear this, but what they practice is, in effect, a secularised version of Christianity, Christianity without the cross if you like. To this they add a self-styled concoction of passion ethics – a fatal brew.

In many respects, this form of liberalism bears comparison with Christianity:

- like Christianity, liberalism has universal pretensions. It is a one-size-fits-all ideology which claims to hold good for all men in all circumstances at all times. Judaism, on the other hand, is particularistic – it doesn’t prescribe for others. So is Zionism particularistic in its call for a Jewish state. Jewish particularism in both cases has led to antisemitism – in former times, because Jews wouldn’t accept Jesus, and now, because Jews want Israel to remain Jewish;
- like Christianity, liberalism is suffused with unrealistic utopian visions. It believes all problems can be resolved by talking, preferably over a cup of tea. When your enemy says he wants to kill you, turn the other cheek and take no notice. But unlike Christianity, the liberal is impatient. He doesn’t want to wait for the Second Coming to see his utopian views realised. He wants them realised now, which is why he wants the lamb to lie down with a lion now (or Israel to make peace willy-nilly);
- political correctness is the way liberals enforce their dogma, precisely as the mediaeval church once enforced blasphemy laws. Actually, it’s worse now. In mediaeval times, the church did the work of censorship, but today PC demands self-censorship. That’s outsourcing without pay, surely, a prohibited labour practice;
- finally, liberalism has its own version of original sin. This remarkable phenomenon, called ‘cultural masochism’, is mostly to be found in the minds of the liberal elite and young people at universities. It assumes an ineradicable guilt for all the problems of the Third World, while at the same time deeming the Third World to be entirely innocent. This guilt, a form of self-hatred, also manifests as a desire to undermine the civilisation of which they are a part. One can see this playing out in the current crisis with terrorism. When a terrorist atrocity takes place, the liberal tells us to look at ourselves rather than at the terrorist. We are the guilty ones,

and the greater the atrocity, the greater the guilt.

At stake here is the soul of Western civilisation. In many respects the West is already on the ropes, confronted by an enemy it neither understands nor has the grit to deal with. The enemy knows our psychological weaknesses and plays on them.

Jewish civilisation - A unique cultural ecosystem

In his bestselling book *Sapiens*, Yuval Noah Harari discusses the evolution of Homo sapiens. He makes the interesting point that because the birth canal limits the size of the human head, all humans are in fact born prematurely. This means that a critical part of human development takes place after birth.

One can think of a human as comprising hardware and software. The hardware is what is given at birth and soon after, while the software is the programming of that hardware that takes place after birth. "Culture goes beyond DNA" says Harari. It is a composite of values, practices, social, economic and religious institutions, all of which order society while enabling individuals to develop free and flourishing lives. This development takes place through the conduit of language and in the interactions we have with family and community.

Culture is by its very nature particularistic, specific and limited. There is no such thing as the universalist culture imagined by liberals. That's why universalist social experiments always fail. People don't buy into them simply because they don't satisfy the basic human need to belong. A universalist identity is a non-identity, a disappearing act into anonymity.

Jewish civilisation constitutes a unique cultural ecosystem. I have appropriated the term from biology, where 'ecosystem' describes 'a group of interconnected elements formed by the interaction of a community of organisms with their environment'. The term can also be applied to culture. A cultural ecosystem is the framework of interconnected elements comprising religion, rituals, beliefs, institutions, values and incentives – the list is long – that constitute the way of life of a particular culture or civilisation.

Every civilisation inhabits its own cultural ecosystem, and functions well or badly depending on the circumstances and the ability of that ecosystem to adapt. If the cultural ecosystem cannot adapt, that civilisation may die. Such was the case with the Crow Indians in the United States in the mid-19th Century. Their way of life depended entirely on hunting buffalo, and accordingly, their

cultural ecosystem consisted of religion, ritual, songs and dances, what it meant to be a virtuous Crow man or woman, how their children were to be raised, and all of these were in some way connected with buffalo hunting or the protection of their lands from encroaching tribes like the Sioux.

When the white man arrived and hunted the buffalo herds to extinction, the Crow cultural ecosystem collapsed. No buffalo, no culture; no culture, no identity, no identity, no meaning, no meaning, no future. As one of the Crow chiefs described it: "Our world disappeared". They no longer knew who they were, what their place was in the world, or what to do when they got up in the morning. I shudder even as I say this. It's an appalling situation for any human to face.

Jewish civilisation could easily have gone the same way after the First Temple was destroyed, or after the Second Temple, or the Holocaust, or after the hundred other catastrophes in between. But something in Jewish civilisation saved it. Not only did it survive, it flourished. It's not surprising that Winston Churchill once referred to Jews as "the most formidable and the most remarkable race which has ever appeared in the world".

The moral law

Three-and-a-half thousand years ago, the Hebrews, a tiny people, found themselves in trouble. Sandwiched between a slew of great empires – Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian and Persian – they wondered how they might survive. They couldn't compete in numbers or resources so they developed alliances. But that wasn't enough to ensure survival. They needed something more.

At that time, the law, such as it was, was the law of the jungle, whose text consisted of a single principle "Might is right", another way of saying that justice resides with the strongest. What the Hebrews did was nothing less than revolutionary. They reversed the notion that "might is right," and came up with its opposite, "right is might". What they had done in effect was to replace a law derived from the animal world, with a law worthy of humans. They called it the moral law and in a stroke they had created the possibility of a humanistic civilisation.

In effect, they had turned a spotlight on human nature, and highlighted the essential difference between the natural world and the human world. That difference is free will. Lions do not choose to be brave or peacocks to be proud. They just are. But humans do choose, and in choosing how to be and to act, they create themselves as human beings. This freedom to choose what we want to be is as supreme an act of creation as any

that can be imagined. It's an act which is almost godlike.

If science is the study of nature, Judaism is the study of human nature. It recognises the deep evolutionary instinct towards social behaviour in the human psyche. This instinct, in effect, aligns the interests of the individual with that of the community. We are cooperative and ethical because it is in our interests to be. Rabbi Hillel's invocation to "love others as you love yourself" is not just a command – it represents a deep insight into human nature, which is that loving others is to love yourself.

This idea which links an individual's own good to that of the community is a profound insight, and its effect on humankind has been vast. It created the possibility of ordering society without force, for large numbers of people to live together amicably balancing the two poles of individual freedom and social order. It linked freedom with responsibility, and together with the sanctification of human life, it gave man both self-respect and the notion of well-lived life. In time, it became the foundation of Western civilisation.

Identity

In the 1968 American comedy *The Party*, Peter Sellers playing the part of an Indian from the subcontinent, is assailed by a Hollywood bigshot: "Who do you think you are?" the bigshot asks Sellers, to which Sellers replies: "In India, we don't think who we are, we know who we are." This self-assured response is the sign of a strong identity. Indeed, Indians, coming from a millennia-old civilisation, do know who they are, something which cannot be said for many people in the West today.

Identity is the base from which we live our lives, and Jews possess the sort of deep and meaningful identity that few people have. It is rooted in community in both space and time. Natan Sharansky in his book *Defending Identity: Its Indispensable Role in Protecting Democracy* (2008) speaks of "a gravitational pull on the human spirit, an interconnection of souls," of souls that "interact across time and space."

Firstly, space.

The Jewish community in Israel and around the world, is a single community of solidarity. In Hebrew we say *Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Bazeh*, "All Israel are responsible for one another". Think of it like this. Nature and instinct instil in us a special duty of care towards our immediate family, our spouses, our children, our parents, and so on.

What the Torah does, is extend this duty

of care, beyond our immediate family to the whole community: *Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Bazeh*. That's why Jews are natural institution builders, building old age homes, kindergartens, schools, and institutions like Jewish Care. It's called mutual responsibility which means that no Jew ever stands alone.

This is a profound social development and quite rare. Two non-Jews had this to say: ex-Prime Minister John Howard whom I met at a Zionist conference in Johannesburg a few years ago remarked that what he admired most about the Australian Jewish community were their community structures and their self-reliance. More recently, at a Board of Deputies luncheon an Australian Labour MP who had just returned from Israel had this to say: "In Israel everyone feels and acts as if they're part of something bigger."

Secondly, time.

As Jews, our identity doesn't just encompass those Jews living now. It encompasses Jews from millennia past and forward into the future. To be a Jew is to be a part of a community of memory and a community of destiny.

So when we sit at the Pesach table, we connect horizontally through space to every Jew on the planet, and vertically through time with a hundred generations that have lived before us and the countless generations as yet unborn. This gives our lives a meaning beyond life itself, beyond the fleetingly physical and material. To be a Jew is to be part of something greater. To use the words of the American poet Walt Whitman: "I am large, I contain multitudes."

Memory

Memory is a core concept in Jewish civilisation and the reason is, without memory there can be no identity. This is a statement of material fact. Think of Alzheimer's disease – when the memory goes, identity goes with it, for what is identity other than the memory we have of ourselves over time?

The same is true for a people or civilisation. Just as my memory constitutes who I am, so collective Jewish memory constitutes who we are. Western civilisation today is suffering from Alzheimer's disease. People have forgotten their past and the Judaeo-Christian and Enlightenment foundation upon which this once-great civilisation flourished. Remember the Crow Indians – no identity, no meaning, no meaning, no future.

Jews have survived for three and a half thousand years because of their collective memory. We may take it for granted but memory has the power to change the world.

When David Ben-Gurion walked up to the podium in the United Nations in 1947, to argue the case for the creation of the State of Israel, he used the story of Pesach to explain how Jews see themselves:

Three hundred years ago a ship called the Mayflower set sail to the New World. This was a great event in the history of England. Yet I wonder if there is one Englishman who knows at what time the ship set sail? Do the English know how many people embarked on this voyage? What quality of bread did they eat? Yet more than 3300 years ago, before the Mayflower set sail, the Jews left Egypt.

Every Jew in the world, even in America or Soviet Russia, knows on exactly what date they left – the 15th of the month of Nisan. Everyone knows what kind of bread they ate. [On Pesach] they retell the story of the Exodus and all the troubles Jews have endured since been exiled. They conclude the evening with two statements: this year, slaves. Next year, free men. This year here. Next year in Jerusalem, in Zion, Eretz Israel. That is the nature of the Jews.

One year later, Israel was a re-established, 3000 years after the Exodus and 2000 years after it was destroyed by the Romans. Then began the ingathering of the exiles drawn by the gravitational pull of memory. They came from 103 countries, speaking 82 languages, and in a miraculous reversal of the story of the Tower of Babel, the 82 languages became one – Hebrew. Is there a better example of the power of memory and how it can change the world?

It is Jewish memory that makes us immortal. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks puts it, “You achieve immortality not by building pyramids or statues – but by engraving your values on the hearts of your children, and they on theirs, so that our ancestors live on in us and we in our children, and so on until the end of time”.⁴

Freedom

Despite the fact that freedom is one of the foundation stones of Western civilisation, it's a little understood concept. It's most complete exposition is the story of the Exodus, but a more succinct one is given by Isaiah Berlin, the Latvian-born Jew and Oxford philosopher. In his essay *Two Concepts of Liberty* he distinguished between two kinds of freedom – negative freedom and positive freedom. Negative freedom is freedom from, and positive freedom is freedom to.

Negative freedom is freedom from something, for example, from constraint or from oppression. It is freedom from being forced to do something you don't want to do. In the context of the Exodus it is freedom from slavery in Egypt. Similarly, black people in South Africa in 1994 were freed from oppression and the status of second-class citizens when they got the right to vote. Sometimes one has to fight for this freedom as part of a collective but it can also be given by an outside authority.

Positive freedom is completely different. It is the freedom I have to act in my own best interests, to do what it takes to make myself happy, to fulfil myself. This freedom cannot be given; one has to reach for it. In the context of the Pesach story, the Jews were given freedom from slavery, but then had to reach for positive freedom themselves. This involved a long journey through the wilderness to get to their own land. No one did or could do that for them, they had to do it for themselves. The idea that positive freedom must be taken and cannot be given is illustrated in the old Chinese saying that “man who stand with mouth open and wait for roast duck to fly in, wait long time.”

This idea may not be uniquely Jewish, but it is deeply embedded in the Jewish psyche. It extends the notion of freedom way beyond ‘freedom from’. One can also say that freedom from has to do with the way others govern us, while freedom to, has to do with the way we govern ourselves, i.e. self-governance.

Before I can start to become the person I want to be, that is, to create myself, I have to learn self-governance. I have to learn to control my impulses by becoming the captain of my own ship. It is a lifelong project with oneself as both subject and object, and is certainly not easy, but Jewish wisdom comes to the rescue with two powerful ideas.

The first is hope. The primal expression of Jewish hope is in the Pesach story, when we say: “Now [we are] slaves, next year we shall be free; now we are here; next year in the land of Israel”.

In his book, *The Legend of the Baal Shem-Tov* the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber gives a metaphor for hope which comes from the Hasidic tradition. It goes like this: there is a rope stretched across a bottomless abyss, each end tied to a slender sapling. We have to cross that abyss by walking the rope and we have to cross it alone. How do we manage this? We need hope but hope of a special kind.

Hope is a double edged sword. If it is not regulated by at least a small dose of reality, it can lead to self-delusion and worse. In his little book *The Uses of Pessimism* Roger

Scruton, the British philosopher, distinguishes between the two types of hope. He uses the word optimism instead of hope. On the one hand, there is the scrupulous optimist, the person who hopes with caution; on the other hand, the unscrupulous optimist, the person who indulges in vain hope.

Firstly, the unscrupulous optimist, which I would suggest is a fair description of the present-day liberal. The unscrupulous optimist is upbeat but doesn't bother to find out how the world works. Instead, he relies on a utopian vision, which, like a template, he superimposes upon the world in order to interpret it. His optimism is based on his ideology rather than 'the facts on the ground'. He regards his ideology as universal and has no qualms in applying it to everyone, including communities and cultures very different from his own – a one-size-fits-all ideology. The unscrupulous optimist does not consider the possibility of failure and when he does fail he takes no responsibility.

The scrupulous optimist, on the other hand, understands the world and is under no illusions about the way it works. His optimism is based on what he knows and understands rather than wishful thinking or utopian theories. He thinks carefully, plans with care, and recognises the limits of his knowledge. One can say he tempers his optimism with a small dose of pessimism. He always considers the possibility of failure and holds himself accountable if this happens. This is the kind of optimism and hope required to cross the abyss. It is kind of hope illustrated by the story of the Exodus.

As parents, we teach our children to be scrupulous optimists. We introduce them to a world that is and always will be imperfect. We teach them that while life has its difficulties, these can be managed by careful thinking and prudent action. We teach them that they are no shortcuts and easy fixes, and that failure is always a possibility. If this happens, we teach them to take responsibility. If we succeed, our children will be well-balanced individuals and useful members of society. It is the lesson of Jewish civilisation.

Na'aseh v'nishma

The second powerful idea is *Na'aseh v'nishma* - 'do and you will understand'. As students of human nature, Jews realised that people could not know what they had not yet experienced. For example, how do you convince somebody to embark on a journey when they have doubts about their ability to complete it? As the Nike ad says: "Just do it". This insight, which took hundreds of

years to penetrate the common consciousness, was known to Jews thirty-five centuries ago.

Judaism is a religion of doing, rather than intentions. The ideal lies in the doing, not in the thinking. Whether it concerns *mitzvot*, or spreading goodness, or working to make something happen, if you just start, the chances are, you will succeed. Even miracles begin with a single step. At the recent United Israel Appeal of Western Australia launch,⁵ ex-Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a statement that literally exploded in my mind. Referring to Jews in Israel, he observed that it was the people who had suffered most during the Second World War that were the people who today hold the flag of democracy, freedom and hope higher than any other nation. To rise from the ashes of Auschwitz, and in 70 short years, build one of the most advanced and successful democracies in the world is almost beyond belief. In a recent survey of 21 000 business leaders, Israel was ranked 8th most powerful nation on the planet. Yes, Jews can take a punch and recover. That's the power of positive freedom, the freedom to make the most of ourselves.

A shining light

One of the meta-narratives of Jewish civilisation is being "a light unto the nations." I've often wondered what this meant and how it plays out. I can only imagine that it means being an example to others. If this is the case, Jewish civilisation is indeed a shining light. The West has always been ambivalent about Jews. But whatever the prevailing sentiment, Jews get on with their lives, defining themselves in the process. And if anyone's looking, they'll notice that Jews value soul over body, courage over convenience, hope over despair, self-reliance over dependency, responsibilities over rights and community over self-centredness. And they'll also notice that a tiny country, condemned to death on the day of its birth by its neighbours, is growing and thriving. And if they wish, they can join in this great project of renewal and rebirth and enjoy the benefits it brings.

The West has taken much from the Jews. The story of the Exodus is the West's meta-narrative of hope and the sourcebook of its liberty, and its influence has been immense. As the German-Jewish poet Heinrich Heine expressed it, "since the Exodus, freedom is always spoken with the Hebrew accent."

The story of how a small people escaped from persecution and oppression and made a long and hazardous journey to an unknown land is not just history or an interesting collection of facts. It defines what Jewish

civilisation has offered the world and continues to offer. It is the patrimony of the world and of every Jew.

Walter Benjamin, a prominent German Jewish philosopher, who came from an assimilated family and had a liberal upbringing, developed his understanding of Jewish civilisation only later in life. He had to acquire, or re-acquire, his Jewish identity. In a letter to Gershon Scholem, his closest friend, he said, "I am learning Jewish [*Ich lerne Jude*] because I have finally grasped that I am one".

To young Jews, I want to say this. If you're in danger of drifting off to imaginary greener pastures, stop for a moment and think. Think about who you are. Look into the mirror of time, as Macbeth did when he saw the endless line of Banquo's heirs. Look into that mirror and you will see your children,

and their children, and your entire genetic line unto the end of time. They depend on what you do. Don't condemn them to an anonymous, non-identity. To be a Jew is to have roots, to know who you are, to enjoy the benefits and the collective wisdom of one of the world's most remarkable people. It is your legacy. But it is your job to find these roots.

NOTES

- 1 Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (1945) – from the Introduction.
- 2 Robin Shepherd, *A State Beyond the Pale: Europe's Problem with Israel*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009, Introduction.
- 3 Book I, epistle xi, line 27.
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BEYOND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

*

David Nossel

There are great challenges facing society in general. One of the greatest, if not *the* greatest, is overcoming differences in religious affiliations and practices. This challenge has a long history - I will refrain from suggesting which event was the first religious argument, in case that itself sparks off a religious argument! Sadly, conflict that has existed between different religions it is not only a historical phenomenon; it is still very much with us today. It appears that people with different religious persuasions often struggle to respect, show honour, or esteem each other. Worse, they find it difficult just to be tolerant. Even worse than that, followers of different religions commonly seem to be critical of and antagonistic towards each other. Religious tolerance seems to be a very difficult task to accomplish.

Is this how it is supposed to be? Are the various religious doctrines mutually exclusive? Is any one religion only as true as the others are false? When one religion criticises another, does the former religion grow in its veracity, and does the latter get its 'just deserts'? These are important questions. Their answers will determine the ability of the members of one religion to get along with those of another.

Perhaps it might be correct to say that in theory differing religions could co-exist. Maybe it is the followers of the various religions that have misunderstood the message. They have not been able to grasp the real message of the religion they have become engaged in, and they have fallen into mistaken negativity and conflict. Perhaps the problem is not in the *principles* of a religion, but in its *principals*. A lack of religious tolerance then may not be by design, but through a lack of clarity, an error of interpretation.

I myself am no expert in the study of comparative religions. Indeed, I am still struggling to keep my head above the water of my own Jewish pool of knowledge. It is therefore with due humility that I present

here my own thoughts on this very difficult subject.

Groucho Marx once quipped, "I am a man of great principles, and if you don't like them, well, I have others...." Although Marx was Jewish, he was no rabbi, nor was he a philosopher. He was a comedian. But as we know, many a true word is spoken in jest. What for Groucho was a joke, for me alludes to one of the greatest teachings of life, as I will explain.

Early on in the Biblical narrative there are two episodes of global significance. The first is that of the Flood and the second that of the Tower of Babel. The Rabbis, in their commentaries to the Bible, point out the most amazing thing. They alert us to the fact that the sin of the generation of the flood was of people hurting other people, committing crimes that impacted on the welfare of their fellows. It was not a sin directed towards Heaven. There was no outright rebellion against God. The sin of the generation of the Tower of Babel was exactly the opposite. There the sin was directed against God. They were building a tower to reach the heavens and to deliver a message from mankind to God to 'stay away!' There was no antagonism between people. In fact, all came together to help one another in accomplishing their most unholy endeavour.

One generation against man, not against God, another against God and not against man. And what was the result? Mind-bogglingly – and soul-bogglingly too - the Divine response was to destroy the generation of the Flood that was against man, and preserve the generation of the Tower that was against God.

A few chapters later we read about God informing Abraham about the evil of Sodom. Abraham's petition to God to save Sodom is no less surprising than God's preference of the generation of the Tower over that of the Flood. Abraham was fully aware of the evils of the people of Sodom. God had informed him just how bad it was. And yet Abraham intercedes on their behalf to try and save them. Why?

To me the answer is clear: more than God wants us to be concerned about Him, he wants us to be concerned about His world,

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the world He created for us. The people of the generation of the Flood were against each other. That God found unacceptable. The people of the generation of the Tower of Babel were not okay with God, but they were okay with each other. That God tolerated. Abraham intercedes on behalf of his fellow people, despite the fact that they were against God. That God appreciates.

This is what I have interpreted Groucho's quip to be saying: We may have principles, deep principles, principles and knowledge of the greatest heavenly and spiritual truths. But if those principles are not able to bring peace and harmony to the world, if they are not to the benefit of those around us, we need to be able to bring other principles instead.

I hasten to add that it is not because it is up to us to make up religious principles ourselves. Rather, if the first principles were not to the benefit to the world around us, they surely must somewhere be flawed. Nor should the replacement principles be mere fabricated, fictitious substitutes. Quite the contrary, they must be the correct authentic principles that were intended from the outset.

This being the case, religious tolerance is not the goal. Tolerance means the ability to 'put up' with someone or something that one disagrees with. According to dictionary definitions, tolerance is: "1. The ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with" or "2. The capacity to endure continued subjection to something such as a drug or environmental conditions without adverse reaction". Implicit in tolerance is the notion of an accompanying rejection. With tolerance comes an ideal and hope that ultimately someone or something that needs to be tolerated will go away. Religious tolerance thus means that although religions have deep and significant differences that clash with one another, we should nevertheless 'tolerate' those differences and agree to "live and let live".

I believe that the goal should be much more than tolerance. Rather, it should be one of synergy, defined as "the interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects". Synergy means that each person or entity has what to offer and contribute to the whole. When our goal is tolerance we get along *despite* our differences. When our goal is synergy we get along *because* of them. When religions are looking to synergize, the greater the number of religions, and the bigger their differences, the more beneficial their interaction and combination potentially becomes.

Surely every religion has something unique

and precious to offer? Are we not all able to be richer and more fortunate because of the multiplicity and diversity of religious contribution? Are we not able to tap into the blessings that each and every set of religious principles brings to our world?

Let us take even a brief and somewhat simple look at the possible contributions that various religious groups can be making: some may convey the blessings of subservience - the willingness to serve the Creator; others might teach the virtues of embracing human beings - taking care of one's fellow's needs; others may alert us to the magnificence of the natural world, yet others might reveal the magnificence of self-mastery, and still others might strive to create peace between all the various different approaches.

What is it that determines whether someone looks at other religions as being a threat or being a blessing? I believe it is the same shift in the paradigm that happens when a person changes from being a child to a parent. I see it with my teenage sons. As soon as they start trying to discover themselves, who they are, the first definition they seem to come up with is really a definition by exclusion: 'Although I don't really know who I want to be yet, I do know who I don't want to be like - my dad!' Young people get their definition by rejecting others who they see they don't want to be like. Much of the sporting world is like that. The greatest teams are those that have beaten the others the most times. When the others lose, we win.

But as we grow older we become more like parents. We see that when children compete against each other the parent loses. All lose. The success of a parent lies in his or her ability to teach the children to care for each other, for each one to use his or her strengths for the benefit of the whole, not for his or her personal one-upmanship and to the detriment of the others.

I would like to think that people of religion are looking to be like parents. Equipped with wisdom, knowledge and experience we have so much to offer the world. It is our calling and privilege to teach the world to be adults, to get along with each other, to care for each other, to synergize.

One of the greatest sages of Jewish history is Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi - Rabbi Judah the Prince. He is reverently accorded the title as simply 'Rebbi' - my teacher. It is as if he is everyone's personal teacher and guide. Rebbi lived around the 2nd Century, at the time of the Roman Empire. Exactly two thousand years after the birth of Abraham he published an anthology of the teachings of the sages, which included his own teachings. In this work, called the Mishna, it says: Rebbi taught - "what is the straight path that a

person should take? That which is beautiful from the one who does, and beautiful to him from what others do". There is a deep reason why Rebbi first introduced the subject of 'the straight path' in life as a question, and only then proceeded to provide an answer. It is because we all start off unsure as to what the straight path in life really is. It is a question we all ask. Is it one's adherence to one's religion, one's God, one's personal growth? Says Rebbi, it is none of those. The straight path that a person should take is the one that finds favour in the eyes of others by the beautiful things that a person does, and that looks favourably at the beautiful things that others do.

It is surely no co-incidence that it was Rebbi who succeeded in forming a very close friendship and synergy with the Roman Caesar of the time – Antoninus (possibly referring to Antoninus Pius). Can we not learn from the special and unique insights and practices of other traditions and religious principles?

Is religion really supposed to be at the cost of mankind and the world instead of for its benefit? If we turn our focus away from what we have right and others have wrong, to what others have right and we have the opportunity to learn from, then we will have transformed our mind- heart- and soul-sets from those of tolerance to synergy.

To me, it seems clear that all religions have something that humankind can learn from. It is only our own lack of maturity that leads us to interpret religions as being mutually exclusive, competitive and antithetical to each other. With such a mind-set the best we can hope for is tolerance. But if we adopt a more admirable and mature approach we will be able to look for, and undoubtedly find, the goodness, positivity, uniqueness, contribution, value and virtue that each and every religion has to offer.

And we'll discover Groucho Marx's 'other set of principles' that were surely intended in the first place.



CHILD OF THE CONCENTRATION CAMP (Part I1)

*

Don Krausz

I have carefully arranged all the fairly innocuous experiences of Westerbork together. We will now come to the real purpose of that camp, starting with a glimpse into the future.

For several weeks I had the job of working in an empty barrack as floor washer and general factotum. The barrack leader was a kindly Jewish lady, a refugee from Germany, who made sure that I did not lack food. One day a transport arrived from a small Dutch concentration camp called Ellekom, which was a training camp for the Dutch SS. The inmates, all youngish men, had been brutalized, starved and were skeletal, almost too weak to stand. I was horrified, although such a spectacle was to become very familiar to me.

The barrack leader managed to obtain cakes for these men, something that I had never seen in Westerbork. She then decided that I was the most suitable person to distribute them, little realizing what would happen. So, all of thirteen years old, I took my box of cakes and stepped into that barrack.

The men saw me coming. They all rose slowly and came towards me, a mass of skeletons with open mouths, staring hollow eyes and pathetic hands outstretched. They did not rush me, did not attack me or try to take my box from me - I don't think that they had the strength. I tried to satisfy them as best I could, but the impact was such that I have never during all these years been able to speak or write about it without weeping or feeling terribly sad. They were put on the next transport to Auschwitz.

Westerbork was a transit camp. Its purpose was to rail 1000 Jews a week to the Death Camps in Eastern Europe. Their destination was no secret - boldly displayed on the trains

were the names Sobibor or Oswiecim or sometimes its German equivalent, Auschwitz. Where these places were or what they stood for nobody seemed to know. All that we knew for certain was that 1000 men, women and children were sent there every week and that they never came back. No letter was ever received from there, no message delivered.

And so there was a terrible fear of those transports, the fear of the unknown. Nobody wanted to be sent there, and if you were, then you tried your utmost to be exempted. But was this possible? We shall soon see.

Every Tuesday morning at 1.00 am, the lights would be turned on in our barrack and the barrack leader would come in with a list. In a harsh, grating voice, perhaps to hide his emotion, he would read out names from that list, names of the people in his barrack who were being sent to the East that day. He would be listened to in total silence, except that as a name was called out you would sometimes hear a cry or a sob. The people so listed would have to leave on the train by eleven o'clock that morning.

So what did people do when their names were called out? Some were just stunned, staring in front of them, not moving. Some were crying. Mothers got up, woke their children and dressed them, prepared them for the journey and tried to find food. There were no shops in Westerbork and the only food on the train was what one could bring oneself.

They did not have many belongings; their remaining time would be spent writing a letter, saying goodbye, and sometimes just quietly weeping. The vultures would arrive; people who would go from person to person, inspect his or her belongings and then say, "You don't really need this, do you?"

But for a very few there was something that could be tried. The Germans wanted us to believe that we were being sent to a labour camp. If you were sick then you could not work, and Westerbork had an outstanding hospital. My father and some of his brothers suffered from stomach complaints, perhaps ulcers, perhaps gallstones. Three weeks after our arrival at the camp we were put on the list. My father managed to have himself admitted to the hospital for treatment. My mother, Irene and I were consequently exempted as well.

Don Krausz has served as the chairman of the Association of Holocaust Survivors in Johannesburg (She'erith Hapleitah) since 1985. Over the past three decades, he has spoken to thousands of South Africans, Jewish and non-Jewish, including addressing many school groups, on his experiences during the Holocaust. The first part of this memoir appeared in the Rosh Hashanah 2017 issue of Jewish Affairs. The second part continues the narrative of the author's detention in the Westerbork transit camp.

There was one snag to these exemptions: one thousand people had to leave on the train that morning. If your name was removed from the list, then somebody else replaced you. For that reason we never went near the train, not even to say goodbye, for if at the last moment it was found that the tally was short, then the Jewish camp police would grab anybody, young or old, sick or otherwise and shove him or her on that train. Their and their family's exemption from the transports depended on it.

A while later we found ourselves in the same quandary. This time the hospital treatment could not be tried - it had been used already. But Jews ran the complete administration of the camp. So my father contacted a relation of his at the hospital, a Dr Haasz, and they both spent the night going from office to office, clerk to clerk, to try and get our names removed from the list. On a "Day of Transport," as we called Tuesdays, the administration would work throughout the night. Dr Haasz was not on the list - he was merely doing my father a favour. By 9.00 o'clock that morning, eight hours later, they finally succeeded, whereupon my father returned to our barrack to tell my mother that she could relax. Dr Haasz's nightshift at the hospital ended at 7.00 a.m. so he went to his barrack.

But when Dr Haasz arrived at his barrack, he found that in the meantime his name and that of his wife and baby had been listed, probably by the same clerk that removed our names. That man had been obliged to replace us with another four people. The train was leaving in two hours' time, and by now it was too late to attempt a rescue. This left us in the ironic and peculiar situation where we had to go and say goodbye to Dr Haasz, without whom this story would not have been written. I shall never forget the look of despair on that man's face. We never saw him or his wife and baby again.

I last saw my father when I was thirteen years old, and so cannot say that I knew him well. I am certain, however, that he had no intention of sending anyone else to these places with the strange names, Auschwitz, Sobibor. I am also sure that he must have felt that his first duty was to his wife and children.

Not long after that, all Hungarian Jews were exempted from transport, and we did not have to worry about lists.

We had been in Westerbork about one year when my father took ill again. I think that he had gall stones or ulcers. In any case it was felt that the camp hospital was not equipped to handle such cases, and my father and his brother Sanyi, who had a similar complaint, were sent to a civilian hospital

in the town of Groningen to be operated on and from whence they eventually returned.

This was not my father's first venture outside the camp. Some time prior to this he had been allowed to leave and go to Rotterdam in order to settle his affairs. His friend van Hulten had begged him not to return to Westerbork and had promised him that he could be hidden. But my father well knew the conditions for being allowed leave from Westerbork: unless he returned by a certain date his wife and children would be put on the next train to Auschwitz.

These episodes also illustrate the difference between Westerbork and a concentration camp, where such granting of leave would have been unheard of. They also served to lull any suspicions that we may have had as to our fate.

There were other lists as well in Westerbork. From time to time word would spread that the Germans were going to exchange Jews for German nationals held by the Allies and that a list of names was being prepared. Such a list would only be for people who had a lot of money to spend or were famous and influential. The list would be drawn up, people would part with a fortune, some Germans and their collaborators would become very rich, and some months later all the people on that list would be put on transport, usually to a concentration or death camp.

The trains were not only there to take Jews away to unknown destinations. There were also trains I gladly went to meet; trains bringing friends and family to Westerbork. Little did I realize the full implication of what being sent to Westerbork meant. I remember the arrival of my uncle, Pityu, one of my favorites, and how happy I was to go and report this to my parents. They were less joyful; Pityu had been one of those who sent us food parcels.

Ravensbruck

In February 1944, after we had been in Westerbork for nearly a year and a half, the Hungarians were placed on transport. First the men were sent to Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany. There were no scenes, I saw no tears. I don't think that any of us realized that this was a final farewell. What did we know of concentration camps? Who in his worst nightmares imagined that there could be a 'Final Solution'?

Yet the parting was a deeply felt occasion. I cannot speak for my mother; only she will know what she must have felt. Irene was eight years old; does she even remember the event? I had not yet had the opportunity to form a close relationship with my father, but I had a strong desire to give him something

of mine, something that would indicate to him that I loved him. So I took my recently acquired silver barmitzvah watch and slipped it into the pocket of his overcoat when he was not looking. It was only when I was an adult that I began to realize the emotional impact that the discovery of the watch must have had on my father. Did he understand what this gesture was meant to convey? Did he perhaps think that I did not want his present?

Several days later the Hungarian women and children were put on a passenger train and taken to a concentration camp called Ravensbruck, 80 km to the north of Berlin. The fact that we traveled by passenger train rather than the usual cattle trucks led us to believe that perhaps we were still privileged. The adults amongst us may have read or heard about such camps; they could never have imagined the reality. Some 50 000 women and 20 000 men died in Ravensbruck (the precise number of women is still in dispute)¹, and that is without there being a gas chamber, at least not while I was there.

It has been said that the death of one person is a tragedy; the death of thousands is a statistic. We cannot comprehend the enormity of such suffering. When speaking to schoolchildren I tell them that if I were to describe the death of one person in emotional terms, they might well weep. But I am not speaking of one person only – I am speaking of millions.

Our journey was fairly uneventful. I remember a young soldier with a submachine gun coming into our compartment and telling us that he and his '*kameraden*' were there to shoot us if we tried to escape. I also remember thinking how stupid it was to say this to a group of women and children,

of which the youngest were babies and the oldest child – me - just thirteen. We traveled via the blacked-out city of Bremen and were left in our train on the station while an air raid was in progress.

Of our arrival in Ravensbruck I don't recollect much, except that all the adults had their civilian clothes taken from them and were given the now notorious grey and blue striped concentration camp uniforms. Luckily there were no uniforms small enough for us children, so we were left with all our civilian clothes. This was to play an important role in our and our parents' survival, because winter temperatures in Ravensbruck were 28 degrees below zero, and without our woolen jerseys and Jaeger underwear, we and our mothers would have experienced the extremes of exposure from which we were to see the other inmates suffer.

We were each given a piece of cloth with a number on it to sew onto our clothes. With this number we lost our identity as individuals. Henceforth we would be called or referred to by number only. If someone in authority wished to report you for punishment, all they had to do was take down your number. And yet the number could not completely block out your identity. A low number meant that you had been there for some time and could well have reached a position of authority or influence. Those with the records or the memory to do so would be able to tell from your number on which transport you had arrived and thus guess at your background.

For further identification you were given a coloured triangle or a Star of David. One's nationality was printed on the triangle, UNG for Ungar (Hungarian), SU for Soviet Union and so forth. The colour of that bit of cloth denoted the reason that you had been sent to



View of barracks, Ravensbruck concentration camp.

a concentration camp. Red meant political, either Communist or resistance, Green was criminal, Pink homosexual, Black antisocial (usually prostitute) and Mauve Jehovah's Witness. A Red triangle crossed with a yellow one to create a Star of David was the worst category of all: Jewish.

Our heads were examined for vermin, and great was the consternation and shame when one of our women was found to have lice and had all her hair shaved off. She literally could not hold her head up after this. We were sent to Barrack 23. Why do I mention this? Because Barrack 23 had a Czech barrack leader who was 'political', i.e. a communist and not a German criminal or prostitute who might have given us very short shrift.

Let me describe our barrack to you. It was made of wood with double walls and fiber glass wool in between. There were cold water washing facilities, but no baths or showers. There were toilets. One ate in a dining hall at wooden tables and benches and if you were lucky you found a three-legged stool to sit on. We ate from chipped enamel bowls and had spoons. The sleeping quarters consisted of wooden three-tier beds, about 60 cm wide, with straw mattresses and a straw pillow; each inmate was given a very poor quality blanket. The mattresses were lice ridden. We children slept five to two beds.



We were woken at half past three in the morning in summer and an hour later in winter. One was given half an hour to prepare oneself for 'Appel' - the roll call at which everyone had to appear to be counted in order to ensure that no one had escaped. If a person was missing then the whole camp had to stand there until the culprit was either found or apprehended.

The tally was compared with that of the previous day and had to correspond. The only way that could be was by bringing the corpses of those who had died in the barrack since the previous Appel to the following Appel to make up the previous total.

Let me dwell a little on the Appel. The uniforms that the women wore were made of cotton or a mixture thereof with artificial fiber. One could get splinters from it. They had no hats, no scarves or warm underwear, no jerseys, no gloves. They wore wooden sandals on their feet and I am not sure whether they wore stockings or not.

At a temperature of 28 degrees below zero one covers one's mouth and nostrils with a cloth or scarf, as breathing becomes painful. We had no cloths or scarves. I have seen grown men cry from the cold during Appel. These poor, shivering women would huddle together like sheep so as to benefit from each other's body heat. They were not allowed to bring their blankets. Appel never took less than one and a half hours. People used to collapse and die during Appel.

When Appel was over, everyone was marched back to the barrack. We children, however, would run on ahead in order to secure one of the scarce stools for our mothers. There were benches, but these would be crowded and difficult to get to. If our mothers arrived early, well and good. If not there would be stand-up fights for those stools after people had been standing for one and a half hours. The Polish women used to try and take our stools, cursing us children the while as '*Zhid Pshakrev*'. I don't remember exactly what this term means, but it isn't nice. I once hit one of these women over the head with such a stool after she tried to take it away from me.

Breakfast consisted of a mug of black liquid, coffee it wasn't, and a slice of bread about four inches (10cm) square and one inch (2.4cm) thick. I called it bread, but it was said to consist partly of sawdust. It was said to weigh about 180 grams. With it one received a small piece of margarine, plus either jam, or a thin slice of sausage or cheese. Cheese? "Stink cheese" every one used to call it because of the smell.

That piece of bread had to last one the whole day; there was no lunch. This situation used to lead to weighty decisions: "Do I eat all of my bread now and starve in the afternoon, or do I save some for later and run the risk that somebody will rob me of it?" I was a child and might not have been able to defend my slice. I used to eat it immediately.

The women who left the camp to perform work did receive lunch of sorts.

After breakfast the women were marched off to do physically heavy labour. They dug trenches, they pulled enormous concrete rollers to make roads, all the while being beaten, cursed and humiliated if the Capo (prisoner overseer) or guard was dissatisfied with their progress; some were lucky and

worked in nearby factories. In the evening upon their return to the camp they would be counted again, and then it was time for the evening meal.

The food would arrive in 72 liter canisters which were each dragged from the kitchen by eight women, one woman on each side to lift the thing and three on either side to pull her along. They would lift that extremely heavy weight, run a short distance with it at a trot and then put it down panting in order to rest.

Dinner consisted of one liter of boiled water containing dehydrated vegetables and pieces of Swedish turnip in it called a 'Shteckrube' in German. No meat, no potato, no fat, and the turnip was part of an enormous thing normally fed to cattle. Very good for cattle, but then so is grass. Actually, if one got any turnip one was lucky, because the practice was to let the canister stand for a while so that its vegetable contents could settle at the bottom. It was then opened and without stirring, the liquid would be ladled off the top of the canister, thus leaving the vegetables at the bottom for the barrack leader and her cronies. After a while we became wise, and starving or not, we would try to make sure that we were not amongst the first fifty people when a fresh canister was opened, because then you got boiled water. Each person received one liter of this 'soup'. On such a 'diet', together with the conditions prevailing in German concentration camps, the average lifespan was three to five months. Can you see now why the allocation of a decent barrack leader was so important? Do you also now realize how at least 70 000 people came to perish in Ravensbruck? With such a starvation diet and those labour conditions a gas chamber was not needed.²

The barrack leader had life and death in her hands and there was no appeal. He or she was not there to look after you. She was not responsible whether or not you survived, and if you didn't, no questions would be asked. If he or she did not like your religion, nationality, the reason that put you in the camp (political, criminal, Jewish, etc.) or even just the look of you she could beat you until you succumbed. Some of my most vivid recollections of that place are the sight and sound of women screaming as they were beaten with sticks. If your bed was not made absolutely straight and smooth you were beaten, if you talked after lights out you were beaten. If you had dysentery and could not get to the toilet in time you were beaten. Even if you got there in time your troubles weren't over, because you were likely to find a woman there who was responsible for toilets, and unless you

bribed her with food, she would assign you to a toilet where you had to wade to get to your destination.

Eventually, one became so weak that one would go down with one of the many illnesses prevalent in the camp: Typhus, tuberculosis, dysentery, 'camp fever'. I had camp fever twice; it was never diagnosed and I was hospitalized for about a week in Westerbork and three weeks in Ravensbruck with it.

The hospital, known as the Revier, deserves a paragraph to itself. First of all you only went there as an absolutely last resort, in fact when they had to carry you there. I was taken there when I developed a very high fever and could neither eat nor walk. Hospital treatment consisted of not having to work, being given a two-tiered instead of a three-tiered bed and nothing else. During the three weeks that I was there I saw SS doctors walk around in their riding breeches and black jackboots, but they never saw me. Not even a nurse came near me. But then how did I get my food? Simple, I didn't eat, only drank water except after I started recovering. I lay in my top bunk with high fever and diarrhea and would drag myself along the wall to the toilet. There I would suspend myself by my hands from a sling that I had made and wound through the handle of the door. One could not sit on that toilet, such was its filthy state, and then I would drag myself to my ward again and somehow get back into my top bunk.

The fate of those lying below a person with diarrhea I won't even describe.

After some time I was transferred from the general ward to a smaller one with only two double tiered beds in it. Once again I was in the top bunk; a young woman who lay perfectly still and naked on her bed and was dying, occupied the one below me. I suspect that other inmates had stripped her of all her clothes. Next to her sat a few women chatting and laughing. The moment that the poor soul on the bed breathed her last, these women ran out of the room screaming, leaving me with the body. It was the first time that I had witnessed a death, let alone having been left alone with a corpse at the age of 13. I have never known of any reason to fear a corpse and found the behaviour of the women inexplicable. My only reaction was a great sadness for that young woman who had died so needlessly and I think that I was her only mourner.

People whom I knew were brought in unconscious. They were placed on the beds and promptly had all their possessions stolen. If they had food with them, which a new arrival to the camp might have, the nurses would sit down next to the unconscious owner and have a feast.

Once while in the so-called Revier, the hospital, my mother arrived and brought me chocolate. However, I was so ill that I could not touch it which upset her greatly. I could not imagine to what lengths she must have gone to obtain it.

I was transferred to a Men's camp when I turned fourteen and so did not see my mother again until October 1945, after the war. I then asked her where she had managed to get chocolate in a concentration camp. She denied all knowledge thereof or of visiting me. I must have been delirious.

One day, when my fever had abated, I saw a woman scrubbing the floor and she told me that she had suffered my symptoms. I asked her how she was cured and she told me that she had doctored herself with a medication called Tanalbin. I asked her to get me some, and that eventually cured my diarrhea.

One avoided the Revier because that place was not there to cure you, but only to get you back to work in as short a time as possible and with minimal expense. Hence the lack of medication. From time to time a selection was held and people who did not show signs of imminent recovery would either be given a lethal injection or sent on a transport never to return. When it became obvious that I might have to go to the Revier, influential friends of my mother first made enquiries to find out whether a selection was imminent. They then monitored my stay for the same reason. One of our group, a child of about six or seven, caught typhus and was sent to the hospital. Although still sick she was smuggled out through a window when it became apparent that a selection would be held.

Considering these circumstances, the inmates of the Revier must have lived in abject misery, in fear and tension and under conditions of utter degradation. I, however, was far too sick to experience most of these emotions. My main recollections are of being ill and the horror of the toilets.

When eventually I left the Revier and walked back into my barrack, the first member of our group of Hungarians who saw me covered her mouth and screamed. I had become emaciated.

What did we children do during the day? We were warned to keep out of sight of the area where the Commandant and his staff could see us. Not that he was unaware of our existence - every roll call would have reminded him. We were told to stay in a far corner of the camp. I remember some of the routines that we developed for our own safety. One was a popular tune that would only be sung when there was danger and every one had to be warned. This

could happen when a person known to be an informer started speaking to one of the children. On one such occasion I asked the informer whether she knew our (warning) song and would sing it for us. She happily obliged and sang it out loud and clear.

Others to watch for were the prisoners who acted as camp police or any of the guards. One of the games that we would play was to find pieces of paper, crumple them into balls and throw them against the electrified barbed wire. A shower of sparks would result and the paper would burst into flame. I think that this playground of ours must have been out of sight of the watchtowers, otherwise our little game would soon have been stopped.

Somebody had to be responsible for us and as my mother had been a teacher, she was put in charge. This meant that she did not have to go out and work as did the other mothers. Like any good teacher, she wanted writing materials and actually managed to see the camp commandant about this. He gave her such a reception, telling her that after six years of war they had other things to think of, that she was only too pleased to get away from him.

My mother did her best to try and alleviate the limitations of the camp as far as we children were concerned. I remember her reciting English poetry to me, i.e. "Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage." She would tell us of books that she had read, and when telling fairy stories to the little ones, who could not visualize a palace, she would describe it as three barracks one on top of the other. Many years later I heard from adults who had been children in that camp and who enquired after my mother; they told me that they still remembered the stories that she used to tell them.

She would do her utmost to shield us from the reality of a concentration camp. When brutal or ugly scenes presented themselves around us, or when the women in the barrack had been stripped naked for some reason, she would cover Irene's or my eyes. At times she managed to obtain extra food for us, with the help of Czech friends.

I have a theory about the effect of preventing a young child from seeing reality. My sister Irene was five years younger than I, and my mother would usually prevent her from viewing and hearing the more brutal happenings in the barrack. I was left to see what went on and come to terms with it. Irene was still aware that she was prevented from knowing what was happening and it is possible that she imagined scenes that were far worse than what were actually taking place. That may well have had a more traumatic effect on her young, impressionable mind

than what I witnessed.

Our arrival in Ravensbruck caused a great deal of emotion among the women there. Many had left their own children behind when they were incarcerated. The younger ones had not had any sexual contact with a man in years, and gave us older boys a lot of attention. But we also noticed that many of the women would weep when they saw us. I thought that this distress was caused by the aforementioned reasons, but the anguish seemed to persist with some of them. Then one day a woman told us that we were not the first children who had been in Ravensbruck, and that our predecessors had all been sent to Auschwitz.

Auschwitz? We knew the name from Westerbork, but why the tears? Then slowly the devastating, horrible truth was revealed about the gas chambers, and the whole genocide programme of Jews. Strangely, I do not recall a period of deep depression among our Hungarian women such as one would expect after hearing that in all likelihood all one's friends and relations had been brutally murdered. Could they not absorb the enormity of such a tragedy? Did they shield themselves psychologically by saying, "This must be happening to someone else, but not to me"?

And what was my reaction? Throughout my stay in the camps I experienced some potentially very dangerous episodes and yet was never unduly perturbed by them. I had the conviction that nothing would happen to me, not even when it was made very obvious that we were going to be sent to the gas chambers within the next 24 hours and at least half our number actually disappeared. That does not mean to say that I did not live in fear and tension every day; it just indicates

that despite the dangers, the humiliations, beatings and horror I did not doubt that I would survive. A safety mechanism, perhaps peculiar to children. At the same time my logic told me that my chances of survival as a Jew were minimal, and as a result I would take greater risks than other prisoners. I knew that I had nothing to lose.

It is also interesting that despite having been in Westerbork since September 1942 and aware that trains left for Auschwitz or Sobibor weekly, we Hungarian Jews from Holland did not discover the truth until 1944. Not that everybody knew except us children: news of that magnitude would not have remained hidden. This was not the case with Jews from other countries. When later on in the Men's camps I met up with French Jews, they informed me that the BBC had been warning on the French broadcasts from 1942 onwards of gas in the Polish death camps.

- *Part III of the author's memoir will appear in the Pesach 2018 issue of Jewish Affairs.*

NOTES

- 1 The Ravensbruck camp was intended exclusively to hold female inmates. A small camp for men was adjacent to it was later built.
- 2 On a much-needed lighter note, I once described the aforementioned to a Scottish audience. They objected to my saying that *Shteckruben* were fed to cattle, saying that these so-called 'Swedes', Swedish turnips, were a regular part of their normal diet. I have always been particular that what I relate is truthful. Thereafter I would state that the *Shteckrube* in Europe is fed exclusively to cattle and Scotsmen.



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INDIAN JEWRY AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

*

Anthony N Pamm

At the time of the First World War, Indian Jewry¹ comprised four basic component subgroups, two of them going back to ancient times and two of comparatively recent origin. The older groupings were the Marathi-speaking Bene Israel Jews, then mainly living in Bombay and other places in the Bombay Presidency, and the Jews of the Malabar Coast, mainly settled in the then Princely Cochin State and speaking Malayalam. More recent arrivals, dating from the late 1700s onwards, were Jews from Muslim lands, many of them from what is now Iraq and of whom a large proportion came from Bagdad. This grouping, which had spoken Hebrew, Arabic and Farsi on arrival, mainly settled in Calcutta in the Bengal Presidency and Bombay. A number of them, such as the Sassoons in Bombay and the Ezras in Calcutta, achieved considerable success as merchants and real estate developers, with some setting up multinational trading enterprises. For ease of reference, they will be referred to as Iraqi Jews, although not all originated from there. The fourth, and smallest, group comprised Europeans, not all of whom intended to, or would, settle permanently in India.

The geographical distribution of these groups was primarily between the Bombay Presidency, the Bengal Presidency, the Malabar Coast and British Burma. The entire Indian Jewish population at the outbreak of the war probably numbered in the region of 20 000. This very small number in comparison with the total population and the eventual massive wartime size of the Indian army should be born in mind when considering the scale of the Indian Jewish contribution to the war effort and what was possible for Indian Jewry at the time.

The Indian Jewish contribution has as its backdrop the socio-political happenings in India during the war. Some of these can be briefly recorded as initial expressions of patriotic loyalty followed by, for some, increasing discontent as more and more men went overseas and casualty figures mounted, food shortages developed, prices rose and Indian nationalist feelings and activities increased. Some in the Moslem section of the population were also perturbed by India fighting a war against Muslim Turkey. Bombay, home to large numbers of the Bene Israel and Iraqi Jewish populations, became a major port of embarkation.

Before preceding to strictly military contributions, I will briefly mention some civilian home front contributions towards the war effort. In Calcutta, D. Ezra was noted for providing hospitality to troops. In Bombay, the Sassoons turned their mills and factories over to the production of military supplies, and also increased exports of foodstuffs to the United Kingdom. The importance of these activities, which absorbed some of the available Jewish manpower, should be realised.

In the sphere of those in uniform, the largest numerical contribution came from the Bene Israel community, with smaller participation by Iraqi Jews and a sprinkling of British Jews serving in the Indian Army. The Bene Israel had had a distinguished record in the Bombay Presidency Army from the mid-18th Century onwards. A significant proportion served in the Bombay Regiments and the Indian Subordinate Medical Department, where many rose to the highest ranks (Jemadar, Subedar and Subedar Major) achievable by indigenous Indians. They remained loyal during the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and served in the various campaigns in which the Bombay Presidency Army participated. At least one was awarded the Indian Order of Merit (then the highest gallantry award available) and another received a rarely awarded Special Gold Medal. There were at least 34 admissions (13 into the first class and 21 into the second) into the numerically restricted Order of British India, which had a smaller-still sub-allocation to the Bombay Presidency Army, was only available to indigenous officers and carried with it the titles of Bahadur or Sardar Bahadur.

Anthony N Pamm is a Cape Town-based collector and researcher in the field of military decorations and awards. His publications include Honours and rewards in the British Empire and Commonwealth (two volumes, Aldershot, UK, 1995). This article has been adapted from his paper delivered on his behalf at the 2016 Inter Faith Week World War I Centenary event, presented by the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe and the Golden Tours Foundation on 19 November 2016 at Harrow, UK.

This was until the mid-1890s, when a reorganisation of the Indian Army took place and in which an emphasis was placed on companies and regiments being manned by indigenous officers and men of the same caste or race. This terminated career prospects for a group whose absolute numbers were too low to form separate companies or regiments. By 1908, there were only six Bene Israel Indian officers still serving (two in the 122nd Rajputana Infantry and four in Military Police Battalions), with another 28 in the Indian Subordinate Medical Department. Two of the latter would be decorated during World War I.

The reorganisation into caste and race-based companies and regiments hardened over the years in the presence of beliefs about some groups being more martial than others and with preferences developing for Northerners over Southerners. This is relevant to any consideration of the participation, or lack thereof, of minority groups in the Indian Army of World War I, when high casualty rates necessitated the availability, if possible, of replacement manpower of the same caste or race as those of the regiment which had suffered losses.

At the outbreak of the war, the Indian Army had a total manpower of around 150 000. This increased nearly tenfold during the war, with the increase being drawn from volunteers from a limited number of castes and races deemed martial and suitable. Some 1 300 000 million men ultimately served outside of India in various theatres.

As stated previously, the Indian Jewish contribution to these numbers must be seen against a background of a total Jewish population of around 20 000. The *British Jewry Book of Honour 1914-1918* records, if I have counted correctly, 178 Jews of Indian origin or Indian Army affiliation as having served during the war. This total can be broken down into the following four groupings:



Cpl E. Moses and Pte S. Samson, India Defence Force

(i) Bombay Jews in various military units (27), including six (one Honorary Major and five Captains) with medical qualifications serving in the Indian Medical Service, four sub-assistant surgeons in the ISMD and eight Military Accountants, all with the rank of Sergeant

(ii) Bombay Jews in the Indian Defence Corps (82), of whom 38 were in the Bombay Battalion, 16 in the Sindh Battalion, nine in the Poona Rifles and nine in the Bombay Garrison Artillery. There were a few non-commissioned officers, with most holding the rank of Private. One of these died on active service. A few of the names listed are indicative of some belonging to groups other than Bene Israel

(iii) Bombay Jewish Division of the St. John Ambulance Brigade (39), comprising two ambulance officers, seven NCOs and 30 Privates.

(iv) Jews from various groups in various units (30), of whom 27 were officers and of whom four became casualties (one Bene Israel and three British Jews).

These numbers may well be incomplete.

Honours and Awards to recipients identified as Jewish were as follows:

- Victoria Cross: Lieut. Frank Alexander de Pass 34th Poona Horse (whose home address was in London)
- Order of British India: Elijah Abraham ISMD (a Bene Israel)
- Officer of the Order of the British Empire: Captains E. Ezra and C.E. Montefiore, Indian Army
- Member of the Order of the British Empire: Captain N.C Myers, IARO
- Military Cross: Capt. C. Abraham, Indian Army
- Indian Distinguished Service Medal: Benjamin Reuben ISMD (a Bene Israel)
- Meritorious Service Medal: SSM S. Laventhal, Indian Army
- Mentioned in Despatches: ten recipients, viz. Captain L. Brilliant, Lieutenants F. De Pass, E. Ezra, G. Goldberg, D. Judah, R. Marks, F. Rappoport, H. Simons, Clerk J. Abraham IVC, Pte. R. Samson, and Khan Sahib, Head Clerk, Kirkee Arsenal.

These numbers might be incomplete as there are a few other names of recipients of awards still requiring checking to establish whether or not they might have been Jewish (including one recipient of the Indian Order of Merit).

Additionally, at least nine of the Bene Israel community received Indian Titles and Title Badges during the period 1914-1919 (seven Khan Sahibs and two Khan Bahadurs).



Lieut. F A de Pass, the first person of the Jewish faith and the first officer of the Indian Army to receive the VC during World War I

It is not known how many were for wartime services.

Finally, mention should be made of an Indian Jewish diaspora in the UK. A partial Sassoon migration produced a younger generation which had grown up in the UK and whose members served in British units during the war. At least one was killed, a few wounded and three (including the war poet Siegfried Sassoon) decorated with the Military Cross. One of these additionally was appointed as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire. Sir Philip Sassoon served as Private Secretary to General Sir Douglas Haig. He was later appointed as a Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George and received a number of foreign awards for his war services. There may also be others from other families to record as well.

NOTES

- 1 I have used the terminology and place names of the time. I further wish to record that this presentation was researched and prepared under extreme time-constraints, hence it should be seen as an overview of a much larger subject.

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PHILANTHROPISTS EXTRAORDINAIRE: THE LEGACY OF THE WOLFSON AND WOHL FAMILIES

*

David Sher

In the Rosh Hashanah 2017 issue of *Jewish Affairs*, I provided a brief history and present-day description of the Jerusalem Great Synagogue, in the course of which I touched on the crucial support provided by Sir Isaac and Lady Wolfson and Maurice and Vivienne Wohl. Given their seminal involvement in the creation of, it is apposite to provide some background to these two key philanthropic families.

Sir Isaac and Lady Wolfson were unusually devoted to Jewish causes, as the following account by Ambassador Yehuda Avner illustrates. Sir Isaac had been contacted by Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who upon entry to office had been importuned by Rabbi Raphael Levin, son of the saintly Rabbi Aryeh Levin (1885-1969). He had requested that the Prime Minister assist him in keeping Rabbi Aryeh Levin's Yeshiva financially viable:

Begin's phone buzzed. "Sir Isaac! How glad I am to have found you." He paused to listen to what Sir Isaac had to say. "*B'ezrat Hashem* our new government will do good things for Israel and for the Jewish people," he responded....After this, he wrapped up with an appeal that came from the bottom of his heart: "Sir Isaac, I would not be troubling you now did I not sincerely believe that saving Reb Raphael's *yeshiva* is a *mitzvah*. And knowing of your charity I thought you may want to have a share in it." The philanthropist's response was so generous, it brought a blush of pleasure to Menachem Begin's cheeks and over and over again he responded with his thanks."¹

Born in Glasgow, Sir Isaac Wolfson was the founder of the Wolfson Foundation, established in 1955. According to Alan Bullock, "He brought to the work of the Foundation the same acumen and experience in investing in projects, people and institutions, to which he owed his success in business." Sir Isaac's projects included fifty synagogues across Israel. In England the Wolfsons were patrons

of many key British institutions and Oxford's Wolfson College, Cambridge's Wolfson College and the Lady Edith Wolfson Room in Trafalgar Square's National Gallery owe their presence to the family. Sir Isaac became President of the United Synagogue (United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire). He was immensely respectful towards Jewish rabbinic leadership and gave Chief Rabbis Sir Israel Brodie and Lord Immanuel Jakobovits the fullest leeway to uphold *Halakha*, most clearly during the notorious 'Jacobs Affair'. In 1958 he bought the Haifa oil refinery from the Shell and British Petroleum companies. His chief motive, it was widely believed, was not profit but maintenance of Israel's fuel supply at a time of Arab boycotts.² Other examples of his generosity included a chair in criminology at Cambridge and one in metallurgy at Oxford, and a Wolfson School of Nursing and the Wolfson Institute at London Postgraduate Medical School.

Sir Isaac was once praised by the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, for his 'princely generosity'. He was made a baronet in 1962. By the time Queen Elizabeth bestowed his baronetcy, by a series of audacious takeovers – including Burberry in 1955- he had built his chief company, Great Universal Stores, into what was said to be the largest mail-order concern in Europe. It was then also operating about 2200 stores in Britain dealing in men's, women's and children's wear and numerous other items. Characteristically, the Wolfson Foundation once contributed \$280 000 to buy a Goya painting of the Duke of Wellington back from an American collector and keep it in



Sir Isaac Wolfson, 1897-1991

David A. Sher, a regular contributor to Jewish Affairs, is studying for his rabbinical ordination at the Jerusalem Kollel.

England. To date the Wolfson Foundation has donated over £800 million in grants since its establishment (£1.7 billion in real terms).³

At the entrance to the Jerusalem Great Synagogue is the Wohl Entrance Hall, named by the donors and founding members of the Great Synagogue, Maurice and Vivienne Wohl of London. The Wohls and their philanthropy were described as “A unique partnership of dedication and grace; for whom living was giving” by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, Emeritus Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth.

Maurice’s father was a pious Orthodox rabbi who officiated voluntarily at an old age home for 27 years. That spirit of giving was imbued in Maurice as he grew up. When he and his sister Ella questioned their mother as to how their parents knew that those people they assisted were truly needy, she responded, “If you give to twelve and only one is genuine then it is still worthwhile.” Maurice was educated at the Grocer’s Company School in Hackney and then at the City of London school, whilst his father entered the property business. Despite his humble beginnings, by 1973 Maurice was listed as one of the top five property developers in the UK although he had established the United Real Property Trust in 1948. Some of his more famous buildings included Reed House in Piccadilly and the imposing State House in High Holborn.

Vivienne Horowitz, born in 1945, worked at Maurice’s offices. Maurice had known her since she was a child as he was on cordial terms with her parents. Vivienne inspired him when one day, as they walked together down London’s Bond Street and Maurice handed a few coins to a beggar, she asked him to give a more considerable sum and take it off her wages. They were married in Jerusalem in 1966 and their name soon became synonymous with charity.

In 1965, with his father’s backing, Maurice established the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation so he could engage in philanthropy as he accrued money. Extraordinarily, he would read in the newspaper of an ill person requiring urgent medical treatment and then track the individual down to cover their costs. Sadly, Vivienne died from cancer in 2005, aged 59, but not before she and her husband decided to establish the Maurice and Vivienne Wohl Philanthropic Foundation. Maurice died in 2007, aged 90. He was buried in Jerusalem beside his devoted wife.

Maurice was both a Zionist and a faithful Jew passionate about his religion. For him, it was a priority to build religious institutions and promote Jewish education. He was particularly supportive of four *yeshivoth*. The famed Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva, the

institution of Chief Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, benefitted immensely when he supplied funds for the establishment of a new Torah Centre, Yad Wohl. In fact Chief Rabbi Kook served as Maurice’s *sandek* in London during 1917. At Yeshivat Beth Abraham Slonim in Jerusalem’s Meah She’arim, Maurice funded the building of the Wohl Torah Centre Complex; this building is almost unique in Hasidic structures in that it features stained glass windows in the main sanctuary. Maurice’s father had been on cordial terms with the Rabbi of Slonim, Rabbi Berzovsky and his brother-in-law Rabbi Weinberg. There is a plaque at the *yeshiva* recording the memory of the many members of the Wohl family who were murdered during the Shoah.

After the Six-Day War Maurice, with Vivienne, assisted in the construction of Yeshivat HaKotel in the Old City opposite the Western Wall. Later, he founded the nearby Wohl Archaeological Museum after ancient artefacts testifying to Jewish presence in Israel for millennia had been unearthed during building work for Yeshivat HaKotel. Maurice and Vivienne also gave a substantial annual sum to Yeshivat Ohel Torah. Following Maurice’s death, his legacy foundation provided necessary funds for Yeshivat Ohel Torah to move to a new building to further its activities.

The synagogues Maurice built were nearly always embedded within a community and often served the specific needs of institutions such as schools or old-age homes. The Miriam Rachel Wohl Hall at the Golders Green Beth Hamedrash (commonly known as Munks) on The Riding was one of Maurice’s earliest projects and was named for his late mother. It is situated in the heart of Golders Green’s most staunchly Hirschian congregation, with most of the customs and synagogue layout based on the German-Jewish rite.

The Wohl Synagogue standing today in Tel Aviv was built after the mayor of Tel Aviv approached the Wohls to build a synagogue in a new part of the city. The Wohl Synagogue at Jewish Care’s Lady Sarah Cohen House (named after the wife of Tesco supermarkets’ Jewish founder) and the Wohl Synagogue at the Jews’ Free School (incidentally the alma mater of Barney Barnato), the largest Jewish school in the world, are magnificent buildings which serve as an inspiration to those worshipping there. The JFS Synagogue provides one of the most potently religious experiences the predominantly traditional student body is likely to encounter. Lord Michael Levy once declared how “through their practice of religion and their wish that *Yiddishkeit* and a love of Judaism remains part of the fabric of our Jewish life” both Vivienne and Maurice Wohl had really made

a difference in life. "They believed in making sure that there were synagogues everywhere, whether in schools to help youngsters develop their roots, or for the elderly to make sure that they remember their roots."

The Wohls also actively supported medical research assisting humanity and in Great Britain, the Royal Postgraduate Medical School at the Hammersmith Hospital was provided with the financial means to establish the Maurice Wohl Clinical Research Laboratories in the early 1980s, the Maurice Wohl Cardiovascular Laboratories in 1990, and the Maurice Wohl Unit of Immunological Medicine in 1991. King's College London was assisted by the Wohl Foundation's benevolence and the Maurice Wohl General Dental Practice Centre began life in 1987. Several years later the Wohl Molecular Biology Laboratory, Liver Unit and the Students' Residence made their appearance. At the 1992 ceremony making Maurice Presentation Fellow, the college speaker discussed the choices that affluent individuals have to make with their bounty; "We are honoring today someone who has faced that choice honestly, who has known success and who has made a sincere attempt to heal some of the world's ills and help celebrate some of its glories."

Maurice and Vivienne acknowledged their responsibility towards their spiritual homeland and brethren; in Israel, the Wohl Paediatric Ophthalmology and Blindness Prevention Centre in Petach Tikva was opened in 1992, as a division of the newly constructed Schneider Hospital. In 1996, the couple enabled the Sourasky Medical Centre's purchase of an MRI machine and they sponsored the Wohl Institute for Advanced Imaging to house the new technology. Vivienne was deeply involved in communal work with London's Stepney Jewish Day Centre, the Meals on Wheels organisation and she and Maurice assisted the financing of the fleet of ambulances operated by Hatzola North West, the Orthodox voluntary and rapid-response ambulance service.

Noticeable ventures were the Wohl Lounge and Wohl Garden Suite at the SAGE nursing home in Golders Green, London, and the closely positioned Wohl Lodge, a sheltered housing complex, encompassing residences with the innovation of temporary dwellings for relations.

In 1995, Maurice joined the board of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), a large-scale Jewish humanitarian assistance organization. He would make sure to dutifully attend meetings, usually accompanied by Vivienne. In his will, Maurice set up an astonishing endowment, with the JDC as appointer, to fund the JDC alongside several other Israeli and international projects

that would prove to be of immense benefit to Jews worldwide. The Wohl Foundation has recorded how the late JDC executive vice chairman Ralph Goldman said, "They quickly became involved in the Joint's work in Israel, and deepened their involvement with us after we were permitted to return to the Soviet Union. I did not have to ask for their help. They saw how perfectly the Joint's mission coincided with their own interests, and they generously offered their support."⁴

Maurice and Vivienne were responsible for creating some outstanding cultural landmarks both in Israel and in London. A well-known recreational centre is the Wohl Amphitheatre in Ganei Yehoshua, Tel Aviv, founded after an approach from Tel Aviv mayor Shlomo Lahat; it acts as a vibrant open-air performance space. Arguably the most famous landmark associated with the Wohl name is the 19-acre Wohl Rose Park, opposite the Knesset in Jerusalem, where some 400 varieties of roses were planted. Indeed one was named after Vivienne's mother, and often visiting dignitaries are greeted here upon arrival in Jerusalem. Maurice and Vivienne would walk in the park on Fridays before the Sabbath. On one of these constitutionals Vivienne spotted a weed in the rose garden and plucked it out, only to be accosted by an irascible gardener. Instead of embarrassing him by explaining who she was, Vivienne apologised and walked on. Incidentally, Vivienne's Hebrew name was Chaya Shoshana, the latter name meaning rose in Hebrew and the rose park was her brainchild. "This Jerusalem with its troubled history is being turned to flower and bloom, to be a city of peace and beauty, of tranquillity and charm. People of peace will come to the city of peace to enhance its beauty. May the Wohl-Rose Park of Jerusalem be an area of beauty and a source of inspiration. May generations walk the paths of this park in peace and solitude and enjoy the splendour of its surroundings" declared Maurice at its inauguration, with Vivienne standing beside him.⁵

A very well-known feature of academic life in Israel is the architecturally radical Wohl Centre designed by world-renowned architect Daniel Libeskind at the Bar Ilan University in Ramat Gan. This institution fuses the study of religious and secular academia.

The Wohls also established a permanent place for themselves on London's cultural scene with the Wohl Room at London's National Gallery and the Wohl Central Hall at the Royal Academy of Arts being important assets to these two quintessentially British institutions. Vivienne led the establishment of the Wohl Central Hall at the Royal

Academy, which showcases a broad range of art to a wide audience. The Wohl Room appeared after they were solicited by the National Gallery, which houses Britain's collection of European art from the 13th to 19th Centuries. With its exquisite glass ceiling, it is a fitting home to the Gallery's Venetian paintings. They were proud to support these two institutions as a way of showing gratitude to the realm that had offered their parents sanctuary during times of uncertainty. Maurice and Vivienne themselves collated a fabulous array of some 35 pieces executed by the foremost Les Nabis, Fauve and Expressionist masters. Many acquisitions were made in October, Vivienne's birthday month. Instructions were left that after their deaths, the pieces should be auctioned and used to assist the disadvantaged. Christie's auction house declared this act "a testimony to their shared passion for art and compassion for mankind." As part of the Wohl Legacy Foundation's 50th Anniversary, the trustees have decided to benefit these two institutions, alongside several organisations devoted to Jewish welfare.

The Wohl Foundation continues Maurice and Vivienne's legacy; on Golders Green Road in London, many are struck by the magnificent and modern Maurice & Vivienne Wohl Campus (2010). This 160 000 sq. ft. site consists of a community centre, a 54-bed nursing and dementia care home and 45 independent living apartments with priority space for survivors of the *Shoah*. A multimedia library and computer training centre exists on site along with a hairdresser, kosher restaurants and landscaped surrounds. In 2011 the Wohl Wing opened at Nightingale House. It features a unit to raise the standard of living for dementia sufferers and reduce their anxiety. In 2013 the Maurice Wohl Clinical Science Institute was opened at King's College, London. This unit will be at the forefront of research and treatment of Parkinson's disease, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, and motor neuron disease.

Before the Institute opened, in Jerusalem, the last project Maurice approved of before his death was the Maurice Wohl Surgical Complex and the Vivienne Wohl Paediatric Surgical Centre at Sha'are Zedek Medical Centre. His funding enabled renovating the operating theatres to state-of-the-art design and allowed for the latest life-saving surgical techniques to be employed.

Together Maurice and Vivienne were both founding members of the Jerusalem Great Synagogue. Jaffe. Maurice Wohl served as President of the Synagogue for twenty years, from 1987 until 2007.⁶ The couple always spent the Days of Awe there and upon arrival, Maurice would go directly to

his seat while Vivienne would first circulate in the entrance hall and ensure that anyone needing to speak to him would be attended to later.

The Wohl Entrance Hall at the Great Synagogue consists of a marble clad space with the *Mezuzah* collection upon the two walls leading to the staircases; five chandeliers light the space. On the left of the Hall is the Wohl Legacy Room, which contains computer screens and artefacts displaying the Wohls' philanthropy. Many medals from the cities of Jerusalem, London and Tel Aviv line the walls.

Maurice's Commander of the British Empire Medal, inscribed "For G-d and the Empire", and the letter attesting to this and signed by Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh, is on display alongside a large photograph of Maurice in morning dress and Vivienne in a dapper outfit holding the medal outside Buckingham Palace in 1992. Maurice also received the Médaille de la Ville de Paris from former French President Jacques Chirac. A certificate attesting to his appointment as Companion of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh is just another document portraying his wide ranging altruism. Maurice was one of the first three to hold this title; Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, was the first. He was extremely proud to receive the title *Ne'eman Yerushalayim* (Freeman of the City), which he proudly noted means Faithful One of Jerusalem. For all this Maurice and Vivienne shunned the trappings of wealth; Maurice would drive around in an old Humber, determined to use money to help people instead of using it on extravagances.⁷

NOTES

- 1 Y. Avner, *The Prime Ministers, An Intimate Narrative of Israeli Leadership*, 4th edn, New Milford, The Toby Press, 2012, pp. 368-369.
- 2 E. Pace, 'Sir Isaac Wolfson, Philanthropist and Business Leader, Dies at 93', *New York Times*, 22 June, 1991.
- 3 *The Wolfson Foundation: Sixty Years of Philanthropy*, London, Published by the Wolfson Foundation, printed by The Bartham Group, 2015, p55.
- 4 American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), [website] <http://www.wohl.org.uk/a-lifetime-of-giving/american-jewish-joint-distribution-committee-jdc/> (Accessed 16 October 2016).
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 A plaque in the Wohl Entrance Hall of the Jerusalem Great Synagogue attests to this fact.
- 7 Leaflet entitled *Maurice and Vivienne Wohl*, published by The Wohl Legacy; The Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation, The Maurice and Vivienne Wohl Philanthropic Foundation and The Maurice and Vivienne Wohl Charitable Foundation, 2012, distributed at the Wohl Legacy Room, Jerusalem Great Synagogue Jerusalem. Versions extant in both English and Hebrew.

THE JEWISH ROLE IN THE VISUAL ARTS AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Stefan Welz

Editor's note: In the last year of his life, the renowned fine art expert and auctioneer Stephan Welz gave a number of public lectures in Cape Town and Johannesburg on the topic, 'The important role played by the Jewish community in South Africa with particular reference to the visual arts and cultural history'. Amongst those who approached him afterwards for a copy of his lecture was Prof. Viola Makin. Sadly, before he could comply with the request, Welz passed away on 25 December 2015.

Prof Makin later made enquiries to find out if the family had a copy and were willing to share it. After a few false starts and lost emails, a transcript was gratefully received in September 2017. During a subsequent discussion with SA Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape) Deputy Director Gwynne Robins (known to *Jewish Affairs* readers as Gwynne Schrire) about South African Jewish artists for possible curatorial research, it emerged that the Board had also asked Welz for a copy, but had not received one. The transcript was then shared with the Board and, after being edited by Prof. Makin, submitted for publication.

The late **Stefan Welz** was regarded as the leading expert on South African art and antiques, with 35 years of experience. After earning his Bachelor of Communications degree at the University of South Africa, he was appointed to the Board of Sotheby Parke Bernet in South Africa. By 1983, he was a director of Sotheby's London. This later led to the formation of Stephan Welz and Co., which he sold in 2006 to join Strauss & Co.

Professor Viola Makin is Strategic Leadership and Governance, holding a doctorate from the University of Pretoria and an Honours degree in Curatorship from Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town. She is an independent art curator and consultant at CurateSA (<https://www.curatesa.com>).



Stephan Welz (1943 - 2015)

Indirectly, the history of the Jews in South Africa starts in the late 15th Century with Jewish involvement with early Portuguese explorers, as cartographers and astronomers. Over the years there was a trickle of new arrivals, notably amongst the 1820 Settlers, but it was only in the second quarter of the 19th Century that Jewish immigrants started arriving in sufficient numbers for congregations to be formed. In 1880 there were an estimated 4000 Jews in South Africa out of a white population

of nearly half a million – less than 1% of the total. Twenty-five years later the figure had increased almost ten times to just over 38 000 – now comprising 3.4%. The Jewish community continued to grow steadily, peaking at 4.5% of the white population in 1936. Although it continued to increase after this date, percentage wise it has shrunk steadily and today is calculated at 0.2% of a total population of close on 55 million.

My story really starts in the second half

of the 19th Century with the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and gold on the Witwatersrand. It was then that thousands of fortune seekers arrived from all over the world. Among them were some two dozen men who, for the first time in South Africa, went on to accumulate vast fortunes. These millionaires moved back and forth between Britain and South Africa and soon became known as the 'Randlords'. Naturally they adopted lifestyles reflecting their wealth, systematically acquiring properties and possessions that symbolised wealth and power in Europe. Arguably, their most symbolic expenditure was on art, which they bought with the same zeal that they had devoted to trading in gold and diamonds. In the 1890s, the Randlords were the most prominent collectors of Old Master paintings in London. This altered the price levels of the art market and established a precedent for the even more lavish American collectors who followed in their wake.

I will deal later with individual Randlords as benefactors to South Africa.

THE PHILANTHROPISTS

At the Cape there were three collectors who, to my mind, stand out as being among the greatest collectors and philanthropists as far as art and culture goes and who made major contributions towards our cultural heritage. They are Sidney Mendelssohn, Alfred de Pass and William Fehr.

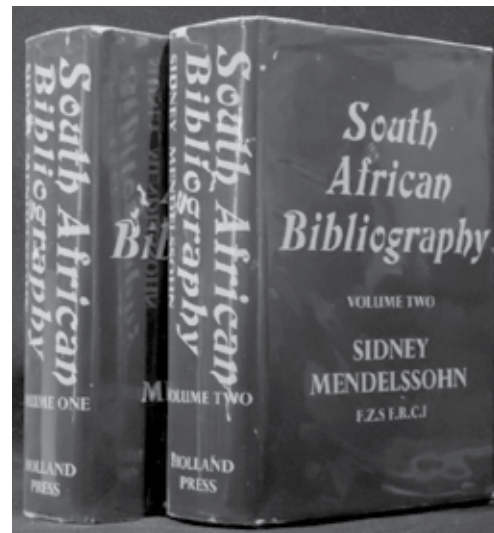
Sidney Mendelssohn was born in Exeter, England, in 1860. His Prussian-born father, naturalized after a 13-year residence in Britain, was a Rabbi in the Hebrew congregation in Exeter and later in Bristol. In 1878, he became the first permanent rabbi of the Jewish community in Kimberley.

At the age of 18, Sidney entered the diamond trade, joining the firm of A.J. Swaab & Co. Over the next twenty years, while he was never regarded as a Randlord, he amassed a fortune as a diamond buyer and became a director of the New Bultfontein mine.

Books on South Africa fascinated him and in 1899 he started collecting them in earnest. He did not only read but annotated them. I quote: "Soon after commencing the collection of African books I began to catalogue them and when I had leisure at my disposal read, or partly read the works and made notes on their contents. Some years after, in the year 1904, Sir Percival Maitland Laurence, the President of the High Court of Griqualand West, delivered an address at the first conference of South African Librarians, on which occasion he remarked, 'Has not the time arrived for a well-considered effort to produce, as nearly as may be, an exhaustive catalogue of works relating to South Africa?' The plan for such

a work had already been evolving in my thoughts and I forthwith decided to attempt the task . . .'

Mendelssohn then moved to London and spent all his time collecting, cataloguing and annotating books. The sum total of his endeavors resulted in his *South African Bibliography*, published in 1910 in two volumes comprising over 2 000 pages, 26 reproductions of rare works in his collection and about 7 000 entries with annotations. Thereafter, this work became the bible of all Africana book collectors and dealers – proving so popular that a facsimile edition of 500 copies was produced in 1957. Although it was subsequently superseded by *SABIB* (South African Bibliography), Mendelssohn's work remains an essential tool for all Africana book collectors.



Mendelssohn bequeathed his collection of 700 books and 300 prints, paintings and sketches to the Government of the Union of South Africa. After his death in 1917 the collection was brought to Cape Town to form a major part of the Library of Parliament, known as the Mendelssohn Collection. He also left two sums of money – £1000 to purchase books published before his death and £2500 to purchase later publications to keep the collection up to date.

Noted Africana specialist Frank Bradlow was of the opinion that Mendelssohn "made what is probably the greatest single contribution to South African culture". No doubt a strong case can be made for this, but having known Frank very well and knowing how strongly he felt about books and more particularly Africana, there might have been a measure of bias in his statement.

Of **William Fehr**, Bradlow says ". . . he has made an equally great contribution in the world of pictorial art". I agree so far as regarding the magnitude of his contribution, but have to add that the pictorial art collection

relates largely to topographical views and that his contribution encompassed much more. His collection of decorative arts and furniture are as important, particularly his collection of oriental ceramics.



William Fehr (1892-1968)

Fehr was born in Burgersdorp in 1892. His father, who was born in Germany, chose to return there with his family in 1901 as a consequence of tension around the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902. William spent his early years in Berlin and London before returning to Cape Town in 1915. In 1920 he founded a wholesale grocery business. This flourished, with several retail outlets. He was also a founder of the Cape Town Sugar Exchange and the Wholesale Cigarette and Tobacco Distributors Association. Although he was a successful businessman his fortune could not, by a long stretch, be compared with that of the Randlords or Alfred de Pass and Sidney Mendelssohn. In my eyes, this earns him even greater respect.

Fehr started collecting Africana as a young man and according to Bradlow was the first South African collector who systematically imported pictorial Africana from abroad. In 1952 he, together with other collectors, was invited to exhibit historic items in the Castle

of Good Hope at the time of the Van Riebeeck Tercentenary. After the festival a large part of his collection, largely paintings and furniture, remained on display in the Castle. In 1964 that part of the collection was purchased by the South African government for R350 000. A year later he donated his important collection of works on paper, which included watercolours, prints, maps and sketches to the nation. This is today displayed in Rust en Vreugd, a fine 18th Century house in Buitenkant Street, Cape Town.

Fehr wrote three books: *The Old Town House*, *Treasures at the Castle of Good Hope* and *A Guide to the Collection at Rust en Vreugd*. He also translated Ludwig Alberti's work on the Xhosa from the German manuscript which he owned. It was published in 1968 as *Ludwig Alberti's Account of the Tribal Life and Customs of the Xhosa in 1807*.

In 1960 William Fehr was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Cape Town. He died in Cape Town in April 1968.

The last of the major collectors who, in my opinion not only displayed connoisseurship of a very high standard but was also extremely generous in his donation to the nation is **Alfred Aaron de Pass** (1861–1952), son of a wealthy Cape family. His grandfather, Aaron, a descendant of an old-established Sephardic Jewish family who had migrated from Holland to England in the mid- 17th Century, came to the Cape with his family in 1846. He founded the Cape Town merchandise and shipping house of De Pass Brothers, ultimately controlling a vast guano enterprise and coastal shipping trade and thereby accumulating a great fortune. His son, Alfred's father, continued in the business.

Alfred completed his schooling in London and went on to get a degree in industrial chemistry from the University of Göttingen, in Germany, after which he joined the family business as a research chemist at one of their sugar estates in Natal. Here he was involved in finding a strain of sugar cane resistant to local diseases, which involved travelling all over the world. Later he also undertook guano research.

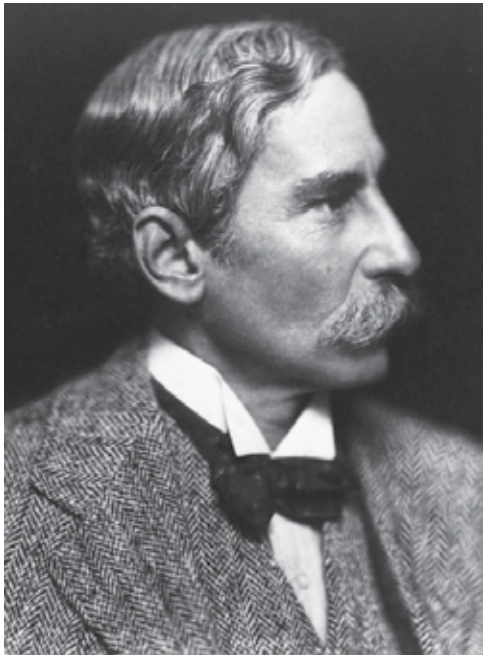
Alfred de Pass was deeply interested in



Part of the William Fehr Collection, The Castle, Cape Town

art and collecting and this prompted him to take early retirement in order to pursue his passion fulltime. He moved to England, where he soon acquired a considerable collection of paintings and objets d'art. In 1926, he donated more than 300 paintings and sculptures to the South African National Gallery. In 1929/30 he acquired collections of Chinese ceramics, Egyptian bronzes, Babylonian artefacts, Persian enamels, Greek pottery and Roman glass, which he donated to the South African Museum. He also donated works of art to the Koopmans De Wet House.

In 1927, after Groot Constantia, which had been destroyed by fire in 1925, had been restored, he re-equipped the house with antique Cape furniture throughout. For his important contribution to South African cultural life, the University of Cape Town conferred an honorary LLD on him in 1950. Alfred's generosity was by no means limited to South African institutions. He made considerable donations to several galleries and museums, especially at Falmouth, Bristol, Cambridge, Plymouth and Truro, as well as to the National Portrait Gallery and the British Museum. In short, he was a Serial Philanthropist!



Alfred Aaron de Pass (1861-1952)

Julius Gordon of Riversdale is a lesser known philanthropist, whose museum bequest receives very little recognition. The Julius Gordon Africana Centre in Riversdale houses a fine, if somewhat mixed, collection of South African paintings, including works by J.E.A. Volschenk and Johannes Meintjes, both natives of Riversdale, Thomas Bowler, Maggie Laubser, Pieter Wenning, Irma Stern, J.H. Pierneef, Gregoire Boonzaier, Ruth Prowse, J.H. Amsheiwitz and Terence McCaw, among

others. The collection also includes furniture.

Julius Gordon (1892-1974) was born and raised in Riversdale. He studied medicine and law but made his money from alluvial diamonds off the Cape west coast. The Centre opened in 1966 and is housed in Versfeld House, which was bequeathed to the municipality by Theodore Versfeld with the proviso that it should house the Gordon collection. Gordon made money available to alter the house so as to be suitable for this purpose.

An interesting aside is that the terms of the bequest stipulate that if the municipality were to close down the museum, the collection is to go to the State of Israel.



THE RANDLORDS

Early in the 20th Century there was a misconception, to some extent still held today, that the Randlords were predominantly Jewish. This idea was fueled in the press, probably for political reasons, with cartoons and caricatures created, particularly by D.C. Boonzaier, with his 'Hoggenheimer' character and by Constance Pentsone (under the pseudonym, 'Scalpel'), who produced 'Joey of Jewsberg'.

In reality, no more than half the Randlords were Jewish or of Jewish origin, and they were the ones who were to make the greatest contribution to South African art and culture. Most important among them were **Lionel Phillips** and **Max Michaelis**.

In May 1910 Lionel Phillips, in a letter to Julius Wernher, states that the Johannesburg Town Council's approval to proceed with the building of the Art Gallery was imminent and expresses his delight that Wernher has indicated his intention to acquire some pictures. He goes on to express the wish that "You will feel inclined to double the amount you mention in your letter to me and bring some pressure to bear upon people like Sigi Neumann".

He then sounds a warning which somehow reverberates right up to the present day: "Now that we may look upon the Witwatersrand as more or less of a permanent industry it is absolutely necessary to cultivate the people's minds and teach them to regard this country as their home. That certainly is the only way

to counter-act those tendencies which produce an exaggerated sense of hatred in the minds of the 'have nots' against the 'haves'. If one considers the profits taken out of this country and the comparatively little spent in those voluntary institutions which in other countries, even in a country such as Canada, contribute to the people's enlightenment and contentment, one realises how it is that the absentee capitalist is so disliked".

Outside of the cultural milieu, other Randlords did make considerable contributions, particularly towards education and infrastructure. Alfred Beit gave £1,2million to the Cape to Cairo Railway Trust; £200 000 towards Wits University and a further £200 000 for educational purposes in Rhodesia, as well as several smaller bequests to various other, mostly educational, institutions.

Talking about Beit one thinks automatically about Rhodes although he was not Jewish. Despite being a major benefactor, Cecil John Rhodes never bequeathed anything towards the arts. Interestingly Prime Minister General Smuts, talking about Alfred Beit, said "Without Beit, Rhodes might have been a mere political visionary, bereft of the power of practical creation".

Sir Lionel and Lady Florence Phillips

Sir Lionel Phillips was born in London in 1855, the only son of Philip Saunders Phillips, a Jewish merchant of modest means. He came to Kimberley in 1875, where he was employed by J.B. Robinson. He was financially ruined twice, only to bounce back to make a considerable fortune. In 1885 he married Dorothea Sarah Florence Alexandra Ortlepp, daughter of a land surveyor for the government of the Orange Free State. She had been born and raised in Colesberg. Her paternal grandfather had come to South Africa for the Berlin Missionary Society, but turned to trading in skins and ivory, while her mother was a British magistrate's daughter.

In 1889, Lionel moved with his family to Johannesburg, where he ultimately became a partner in what became the Corner House, one of the most powerful mining houses on the Witwatersrand. His life history and career is extremely interesting and much has been written about it. He was, for instance, sentenced to death for his role in the Jameson Raid, pardoned by Kruger, shot by a crazed disaffected miner, and so on. I, however, will stick to his role in promoting art and culture in South Africa.

In everything they did, Lionel and Florence Phillips were driven by their love for South Africa. They espoused all causes which could benefit, conserve or promote the country, its people and its culture.



Sir Lionel Phillips 1903, oil on canvas by Giovanni Boldini, Johannesburg Art Gallery



Lady Florence Phillips 1909, oil on canvas by Antonio Mancini, Johannesburg Art Gallery

Max Michaelis was born in Germany in 1852. As a young man he worked in a Frankfurt banking house before migrating to South Africa in 1876. He went to the Kimberley diamond fields and was one of the founders of Wernher Beit & Co. After gold was discovered on the Witwatersrand he moved to Johannesburg, where he became manager of the Central Mining and Investment Corporation. He spent nearly 25 years in England at the company's headquarters in London and led a very secluded life there on his country estate.

Michaelis was a great philanthropist and we

have much to thank him for: a £5000 donation (one of the biggest) to Florrie Phillips's purchasing fund for the Johannesburg Art Gallery (calculated as being worth somewhere between £500 000 and £4 million in today's money); the establishment of the Michaelis Art Library in Johannesburg; the collection of Dutch and Flemish old masters in the Michaelis Collection, housed in the Old Town House, Cape Town; a Chair of Fine Arts at UCT and much else besides. On his death, his wife donated 53 Old Master drawings and 59 paintings to the South African National Gallery, and 58 paintings to the Pretoria Art Museum. His is the biggest benefaction of art to South Africa by a Randlord.

Sir Ernest Oppenheimer and his son Harry are somewhat of a problem when it comes to gauging their role in supporting the arts – not because they did not play a big role but because of the private nature of their support. Also, a great deal of what they made possible was done through Anglo American (the Chairman's Fund) and De Beers, essentially shareholder's money. Sir Ernest made some considerable donations to educational institutions in South Africa and Great Britain. On his death in 1957 his estate was bequeathed to his son Harry. His will contained no charitable bequests but Harry immediately formed the Ernest Oppenheimer Memorial Trust, to which he gave £1 million.

It is interesting to note that much of what has been made available to the public in terms of art and culture remains largely under the control of the persons or bodies that made the loan. So, for instance, the Humphreys Loan Collection and Timlin Collection in the William Humphreys Art Gallery in Kimberly are on indefinite loan from De Beers as is the Brenthurst Collection of African Art in the Johannesburg Art Gallery. The Brenthurst Library in Johannesburg has until recently published important manuscripts and pictures in the library, but these were prestige publications produced in limited editions. Although one can talk of an admirable institution in this instance, it is not exactly a public one. In Sir Ernest's obituary, published in *The Times*, his philanthropy is described as 'stealthy and imaginative' – a policy which, to a certain extent, is still pursued today.

COLLECTORS

Ben and Cecilia Jaffe

Ben Jaffe was born in Paterson, New Jersey, USA, in 1890. His mother could not adjust to life in America so returned to her country of birth, Lithuania, with her four children. Their return was, however, short-lived as they once again emigrated, this time to South

Africa, arriving in Cape Town in 1903. Cecilia Shapiro was born in Lithuania in 1891. Her father, who had been to South Africa several times, in 1907 persuaded his wife to follow him there with their three children.

Ben and Cecilia were married in 1913. They settled in Cape Town, where Ben worked as a bookkeeper/accountant on a modest salary. They immediately took a keen interest in the city's cultural activities. Ben was present at the first concert given by the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra in February 1914. Cecilia had just given birth to their first child and could not attend. They continued to subscribe until the death of Cecilia in 1977 – they were members for 63 years!

Ben never owned a car although he was one of the first people to get a driver's license in Cape Town, in 1913. Their seven children were all university educated, there was always food on the table and they kept an open house for all and sundry. Despite all this, the Jaffes were able to put together an incomparable collection of South African art, as well as a fine collection of decorative art. At the time of Ben's death in 1978 the collection included sixteen Gregoire Boonzaier paintings, five works by Cecil Higgs, seven by Wolf Kibel, twenty by Lippy Lipshitz, six Freida Locks, twelve by Irma Stern and nine by Jean Welz – an outstanding testament to their support for the arts and local artists.

For many who knew the Jaffes, the most vivid and joyful memories are about their 'open house' on Sunday evenings after the symphony concert. Lippy Lipshitz, Gregoire Boonzaier, Jean Welz – in fact all the artists active in Cape Town at the time - dropped in regularly as well as visiting artists, musicians, academics and writers. Stories around these evenings are legendary, particularly those relating to Irma Stern, probably one of the most regular visitors. As described by one of the Jaffe children, she was "an oddly warm friend with a most abrasive personality. She regarded hardly any picture in our house, except her own, as worth hanging". Sadly, after Ben died, all efforts to keep the collection together failed, and I ended up being commissioned to sell it at auction in Johannesburg in October 1981.

Jack and Helene Kahn

It was only when their collection of South African paintings came up for auction in Cape Town in February 2007 that the South African art world sat up and took notice. This auction marked a turning point for the South African art market.

Jack Kahn's family came from Latvia. His father owned the Orient Candle Factory in Roeland Street, Cape Town, and it was here

that Jack first met local artists – Wolf Kibel and Lippy Lipshitz had their studio in the building adjacent to the factory. The studio became known as the Palm Studio, recorded in many paintings and reminiscences. Kibel in particular made a big impression on Jack and he often recounted how his father gave Kibel candle wrapping paper when he ran out of materials – and no doubt helped him with many other things too. How often have I not come across Kibel drawings or watercolors on coloured paper – candle wrapping paper!

Jack Kahn married Helene Levitt in 1961. They had no children. In their very quiet way the couple put together an amazing collection which, as proved later, collectors were willing to give their eye teeth for. In their unpretentious Sea Point flat the pictures were rarely seen by anybody but themselves although they were always prepared to lend them for public exhibitions. I had the pleasure of being invited to their flat from time to time. They regularly attended auctions and previews but always remained very humble about their collection.

Jack Kahn died in 2005 and Helene some months later in 2006. Joe Wolpe very aptly described Jack as “someone who will be remembered with great respect and affection by all who knew him as a thoroughly decent human being of dignity, integrity, unassuming, quietly-spoken, all-round gentleman of the old school”.

When it came to art, the words ‘money’ and ‘investment’ were not in their vocabulary. I would like to believe that it was for this very

reason that when the collection was sold, it proved such a great success in every respect – including as investment. The auction of 46 paintings and sculptures raised just over R23 million against a presale estimate of under R7 million. The highest price was paid for Irma Stern’s *Indian woman*, which made R6.6 million – the then absolute record. Sometime after the auction *The Economist* noted that prices for Stern had stagnated and that only after two Sterns sold on the Kahn auction for R6,6 and R2,64 million respectively did her work gain international renown.

The most heartening part of this story is the fact that the Kahns left the bulk of their estate to charity.

DEALERS

Joe Wolpe

Joe Wolpe was born in Cape Town in June 1922. His father Max had immigrated to South Africa from Lithuania at the beginning of the century. Max was a freelance photographer, later very successfully turning to picture framing. Joe started his working life in 1940 as an articled clerk, aiming to become an accountant. In 1945, however, when his father’s health deteriorated, he seized the opportunity to join the family business.

Slowly, through circumstance and Joe’s own doing, the business was transformed from purely framing to framing and dealing in art. Few dealers have managed to maintain such a consistently high standard as regards aesthetic values as Joe has. With his remarkable instinct to recognise great talent, integrity and a fine sense of humour, he is a thoroughly lovable person, always putting the artist’s interests first. I can add that he is an accomplished artist in his own right, although very reticent about this talent.

Many South African collectors are or were greatly indebted to Joe for recommending or coaxing them into buying major works of art they have never regretted buying. So often when I come across a major South African painting, I can trace it back to him – as he only sold paintings he himself liked one senses or recognises a certain pattern.

But, it was not only as a dealer in South Africa art that Joe excelled. At one time he was the most important local dealer in international art. Those collectors who made use of his services as consultant and trusted him to buy for them in the main art centres of the world built up remarkable collections. Purchases included works by painters such as Marc Chagall, Ben Nicholson (his favorite – paying the record price for the artist at a Sotheby’s auction in London in 1971) and



*Irma Stern, Portrait of an Indian woman
1936, oil on canvas*

Giorgio Morandi and famous sculptors such as Henry Moore, Elizabeth Frink, Barbara Hepworth and Marino Marini.

Louis and Charlotte Schachat

Louis was born in 1926, the son of a Lithuanian father and English mother, and grew up in Robertson. His father traded in ostrich feathers and speculated in cattle. Louis qualified as a lawyer and practised in Cape Town for some twenty years. During this time, he married Charlotte and raised a family, two daughters and a son.

The Schachats started collecting oriental carpets and South African paintings. The latter became their enduring passion, to the extent that in 1971 they decided to open an art gallery – Die Kunsamer – which was to become a household name in South African art circles. The choice of an Afrikaans name is not surprising. In Robertson, Louis had grown up in a largely Afrikaans community and spoke the language fluently.

Die Kunsamer soon became a dominant force in the South African art market. Given Louis' integrity, sound judgement, discerning eye, enthusiasm and excellent relationship with collectors, artist and fellow dealers and auction houses this was hardly surprising. Here they mounted major exhibitions and set new standards of excellence.

The tumultuous politics of the 1970s tested South African society to the limit. Needless to say, the local art market came under severe strain and by 1980 many galleries and dealers had closed their doors. Louis and Charlotte, however, had faith and confidence as well as the support of a loyal client base, admiring collectors and friends to carry them through these turbulent times.

Louis had the courage and insight to expand his business beyond the comfort zone of established artists. Over the years he encouraged and supported young artists. He gave many an opportunity to exhibit at Die Kunsamer and acquired their work not only for stock but for his own collection. By way of generous donations and sponsorships, the Schachats supported numerous exhibitions, publications and other art-related events.

There were several other dealers who positively influenced both collectors and the art market:

Eljra Solomon was one of seven children born in Parow, Cape, where his father was a scrap metal dealer, amongst other things. His youngest brother Yonty (Jonathan) became a highly respected concert pianist and in Britain professor of music at both the Royal College of music and Trinity College.

Eljra and his partner had a nursery in Tokai. They put together a remarkable collection

of South African paintings. On his partner's death the collection was sold to Dr and Mrs Anton Rupert and forms the basis of their collection. Eljra became an art dealer moving to Paarl where he had a charming double-story Georgian house on the main road. He died when his car hit a buck while he was returning from a trip to Johannesburg.

Solly Disner was born in 1909 in Lithuania and came to South Africa in 1927. Initially he had a general dealer store on the Cape Flats. In 1940 he turned to sculpting and was reasonably successful. He also acted as art advisor to respected collectors such as Jack and Helene Kahn.

David Heller was a Cape Town antique dealer who put together an important collection of Cape silver, now in the Cultural History Museum, Cape Town. He was also responsible for two important books on Cape silver and one on VOC glass.

Ashbeys Galleries was founded by Edwin Ashbey in 1891. In 1914 he sold the business to **Morris Robinson** and left for Australia. Until well into the 1950s the galleries could be hired for exhibitions and auctions. So, for instance, John Marcus conducted auctions at Ashbeys. Morris died in 1946 and his son **Basil** – although he had not previously been involved in the business – took over on his return from service in the Second World War. Over many years, he and his wife Sue built up a remarkable collection of South African art and decorative arts, during which time Ashbeys was one of the most prominent auction houses in Cape Town.

I conclude by noting a few art dealers operating mostly out of Johannesburg.

Matthew (Taffy) Whipman, an artist, gallery owner and art framer, was one of the first art dealers to introduce European and British graphic art to South Africa. He specialised in selling lithographs, multiples, etc. by the likes of Chagall, Braque, Matisse and Moore.

Linda Goodman, later Givon, was born in Johannesburg in 1936 and opened the Goodman Gallery in Hyde Park, Johannesburg, in 1966. All along, the accent of the gallery was very much towards younger contemporary artists. In many ways, artists such as Cecil Skotnes, William Kentridge and Willie Bester owe at least some of their success to Linda. Although she sold her gallery some years ago [since 2008, it has been under the directorship of Liza Essers] she continues to take an active interest in the art world.

The list of people I have mentioned is by no means complete and if there are serious omissions I apologise. I conclude with a very apt quote from an essay published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1899 in which Mark Twain observed:

. . . If statistics are right, the Jews contribute but one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous, dim puff of stardust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly, the Jew ought hardly to be heard of but, he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also always out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages: and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it.



Linda Givon and Norman Catherine at the first Goodman Gallery in 1973



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A MYSTERIOUS PAINTING IN A CAPE TOWN SYNAGOGUE AND THE STORY BEHIND IT

*

Ute ben Yosef and Gwynne Schrire

In 2013, a Cape Town auctioneer told Darryl Kaimowitz that a painting of rabbis discussing the Talmud was to be auctioned. On a brass plaque attached to the frame was inscribed, "Presented to the Arthur's Road Hebrew Congregation in memory of the late Israel Kellner, 1978". How and when it came to end up at the auction house, no one knew, nor had anyone thought to comment on its absence. For R50, Mr Kaimowitz bought the painting and returned it to the Arthur's Road shul.

What was the story behind the presentation, and what was the story behind the painting itself?

Roydon Sacks asked Art historian Dr Ute Ben Yosef and Gwynne Robins to investigate.

Arthur's Road congregation had started its life in August 1897 as the Beth Hamedrash Yeshurin at 23 Buitenkant Street, District Six, becoming the Chabad Shul around 1914. According to S.A. Rochlin, few congregants were originally Chassidim by birth or by conviction – indeed, nearly all were strongly *Misnagid* in outlook. However, "nearly all of them were masters of Tephillah and Niginot of the traditional hue...A daily feature wholeheartedly sponsored by this group was the story of the Talmud."¹

As the congregation of poor Yiddish-speaking immigrants from Eastern Europe settled down and started to move up the mountain, it became difficult to get a minyan, so in August 1945, the shul relocated to Virginia Avenue, Vredehoek. As the next generation in turn moved to the Sea Point beach front, the congregational leaders under chairman Israel Kellner and vice chairman Isidore (Socher) Zeldin decided to purchase Erf

951 in Sea Point East (known as Verandah Lodge) from the Dutch Reformed Church on 28 March 1953. Membership fees were kept low at three guineas - eighteen months later the congregation was still struggling to pay off the bond, with R5 500 owing.²

Philip Goldman recalled, "While having Sunday tea with the family, in stormed Israel Kellner, a man of intense vitality who never knew the meaning of the word 'no'. He asked us to join him over the road to *daven minchah*. We stood among the bricks and cement and had the first service of the Hebrew Congregation Chabad".

Goldman was invited by Kellner to become a member, and he soon became the congregation's secretary and treasurer. Then the inevitable dissension set in (for which the picture here discussed is a suitable metaphor), which "led to squabbles and disunity in the shul as most Sea Point [Jews] could not accept Chasidism. As a result, membership dropped and financial problems arose, forcing the shul to take out a first and second bond with the S.A. Mutual". Kellner as a result approached Philip's father, Dick Goldman, to help the shul over its financial and managerial problems. "My father took up the challenge by retiring from the family business, which enabled him to concentrate fully on the shul's affairs. Chasidism was not a success in Sea Point, resulting in us changing to an Ashkenazi service. Thus the Beit Midrash Morasha at Arthur's Road was born."³



Fig. 1: Arguing Rabbis, Oleograph. 57x78cm, Sigd: below right: H N Weiss in possession of Beth Midrash Morasha at Arthurs Road. Photo: Roydon Sacks

Dr Ute Ben Yosef has a BA in Librarianship and a PhD in History of Art. She studied at the University of Pretoria (where she later was senior lecturer in Art History) and the Free University of Berlin. After working as an Art critic for newspapers in Switzerland, she became head Librarian of the Jacob Gitlin Library in Cape Town, whilst lecturing and publishing on contemporary artists. Gwynne Schrire, a veteran contributor to and editorial board member of Jewish Affairs, is Deputy Director of the Cape Council, SA Jewish Board of Deputies. She has written, co-written and edited numerous books on SA Jewish and Cape Town history.

Israel Kellner played an enormous role in the synagogue. His grand-daughter Merle Finkel describes him as “a most determined, energetic man who saw his dreams become a reality”. Another grand-daughter, Bubbles Segal, remembers the painting hanging in his lounge over the couch opposite cabinets housing crystal items. “So typical of Yidden learning”, it represented something he loved to do.⁴ In 1978, Israel’s son, Eli, donated the picture in his father’s memory to the Beit Midrash Morasha congregation.

The painting shows a group of five Chassidic sages depicted in the style of genre pictures of the 19th Century Hungarian-Jewish artist Isidor Kaufman (1853-1921), who lived and worked in Vienna. A sixth man is *davvening* in the background. The five men are arguing vigorously whilst taking snuff or pointing on the page in the Talmud. It is a lively, humorous scene. We see on the left an ark covered with a curtain on which the words *Keter Torah* is embroidered (thus the scene takes place in a shul), a lit candle on the background wall and a ‘*Judenstern*’ chandelier.⁵

The signature does not refer to any known artist of the period reflecting the style of the painting. This was another mystery. However, surfing the internet, copies of several virtually identical paintings appeared – some with the characters reversed as in a negative, some with different backdrops, some with different artist’s signatures. One blog showed the painting and asked if anyone knew who the artist was. A respondent replied that her grandfather bought it and two other paintings from a Holocaust survivor who had painted the reproduction. Another copy is signed with a name that looks like “S Leyon”.

One look-alike - see picture below signed Hebert - was sold on EBay, which described it as “beautiful oil on canvas painting [that] was around 200 years old” and ‘painted’ by French painter and academic Antoine Auguste Ernest Hébert (1817-1908 - which certainly would not make it 200 years old).⁶



Fig. 2. Arguing Rabbis. Oleograph. (Undated) Ebay Sgd. Auguste Ernest Hébert.

Christie’s in London sold it in 2007 for €9755.46 as the work of B. Werner, a German painter.⁷ B Werner signed many identical pictures sold under the following titles: ‘*A difference of opinion*’, ‘*L’argumentation*’, ‘*Rabbis in a debate*’, ‘*Rabbiner bei Torah-Diskussion*’ and ‘*Angeregte Gespräche, 1900*’. There seems to have been a consistent demand and a ready market. ‘Werner’s’ picture takes two forms – the picture similar to the one in the Arthur’s Road shul, and another of the same persons a little later in their argument, in angrier poses and with more books on the ledge above them.

Since B Werner does not appear in any extensive 19th Century compendium of German artists⁸ no other information about him seems to be available, leading one to the conclusion that like H N Weiss, he was also a Victorian copy artist earning a living painting reproductions.

In the 19th Century, cheap copies of paintings became available. The Victorian Age was the age of printed pictorials that took shape by means of the various printing and engraving processes. These were known as oleographs, also called chromolithographs, that came into wide commercial use in the 1860s until more efficient techniques were developed at the end of the century. They were printed in oil colours to imitate the appearance of an oil painting and, when heavily varnished, the effect was almost identical to that of an oil painting. The copies were usually signed by the copy artists. Van Gogh wrote that artists “deplored the spiritless and uninspired ‘oliographs’ of their academical contemporaries.”⁹



Fig. 3 Signed B Werner Wikigallery

One reproduction appears (above), in garish colours on the cover of *A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Torah* (ArtScroll Judaica classics) by Shelomoh Yosef Zevin, but the artist is neither mentioned nor acknowledged.¹⁰

A firm that made many chromolithographs was that of Raphael Tuck, who invented the Christmas card and popularised post cards. Born in 1821 in Koschmin, Poznan, he attended yeshivah, becoming an accomplished Talmudic



Fig 4 Cover of *A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Torah* (ArtScroll Judaica classics)

scholar and continuing to study Talmud for the rest of his life. Although his business was in London, most of his colour work was contracted in Germany. Because so few chromolithographs have survived, their value among collectors has greatly increased. So, did his firm reproduce what was obviously a picture that had great appeal for Jewish immigrants to the New World with a certain degree of nostalgia and sentimental attachment to the life they left behind?



Fig. 5 *L'argumentation*, Signed B. Werner, Artnet

In an article posted by “Doctor Science”, the anonymous writer states that he regards this picture “as the most accurate depiction I’ve seen of how ‘two Jews, three opinions’ plays out even in the most serious and scholarly of discussions”. He sources the origin of the picture to the one below, unfortunately without giving the source.¹¹

This picture looks as though it could have been the original which the printers produced, either in colours or in a way enabling the artist to fill in the colour. With dates given by the owners ranging from 200 years-old to made by a Holocaust survivor, are there any clues in the painting to help? The dress and fittings in the Morasha painting seem to date the picture to the 18th or 19th Century. The



Fig. 6, *Debating Rabbis* (n.d.)

‘*Judenstern*’ candelabra, the star-pointed light that is illustrated in the doorway above the man praying in some of the versions, was used from the 15th to 19th Century in Holland and Germany. There is also a candle, and the man on the left is busy taking snuff. Snuff was popular from the 17th Century, bun feet from the 17th to 19th Century and barley sugar twisted legs from the 17-19th Century – although the legs in these pictures are unusually elaborate. The men are dressed in the kaftans common in that period in Eastern Europe, with slip on shoes. The table in Werner’s first painting appears to be younger, more solidly 19th Century although the *Judenstern*, now on the right, is still there.

In 2015, Morasha member Evan Robins visited the Durban United Hebrew Congregation. He felt at home immediately because there at the *brochah*, looking down at him from the wall was the picture of the arguing rabbis familiar to him from Morasha. Like the painting donated by Eli Kellner, this had been donated to the shul by one of their members. The two were identical except that the signature of the artist was different. The signature on their painting looks something like ‘?nflar Schleicher’.



**Fig 7, Lot 192: Carl Schleicher, Austrian Fl.1859-1871
19th Century Paintings by Sotheby’s,
12 November, 2003**

Morasha's artist is H N Weiss. But this led onto a discovery that may have produced the solution.

A Google search finds a 19th Century Austrian artist called Carl Schleicher (1825, Lemberg/Lvov - 1903, Padua, Italy), who worked in Vienna and Munich painting 'biedermeier' genre scenes with a lot of interior details. His signature is completely different to the Schleicher signature on the Durban painting, which indicates that the artist deliberately changed the first name to avoid being accused of fraud (which is more than the person did who signed Hébert's name to a painting so different in style to that of the French artist).

Unlike unknown artists H N Weiss, S Leyon, B Werner and ?nflar Schleicher who have produced works identical to the oeuvre of the Austrian Carl Schleicher, the latter is known to have existed.

This painting must have proved to be a best seller for the wealthy Jews in Austria and Germany because Schleicher repeated the tried and tested formula a number of times. Identical people appear in identical positions and poses with similar furniture before a similar wall. Sometimes the wall has a lamp, sometimes an upright framed manuscript, sometimes a slanted framed manuscript, sometimes a shelf containing the framed manuscript and books. Occasionally, one finds an ark, a cupboard or a praying figure in the dim far left. At other times, the figure is on the far right. Sometimes the stool with the tallis is on the right, sometimes on the left. Was the original by Schleicher? As he has painted the same arched wall in other pictures of his – with chess players or gamblers or drinkers sitting before it and has also painted two Catholic priests in discussion (these could not have sold as well as they have not been repeated as often), it seems most likely that he was the originator.



Fig 12, Carl Schleicher

<http://image.invaluable.com/housePhotos/sothebys/59/311559/H0046-L25976833.jp>

So does it mean that we have traced the Ur-original to the artist who first painted this scene? Was it a product of the genius of the genre artist Carl Schleicher? But wait - what about the identical paintings credited to the 19th Century artist B Werner? Or to the French artist Antoine Auguste Ernest Hébert, or signed by ?nflar Schleicher or S Leyon? Unless proved otherwise, the likeliest explanation is that in an age lacking copyright legislation they all copied Schleicher.



Fig 13 Painting "Rabbis Discussing Talmud" www.icollector.com 640 × 454 Online Collectibles auction held 17.9.2009 New Jersey, USA

Various auction houses have sold these almost identical originals at respectable prices ranging from \$5000 and €1000 under the names of different artists. It is surprising that they have not queried this. The continued popularity of this painting has produced another example of man's desire to make money. One company¹² offers to paint an oil copy of B Werner's *A difference of opinion* on canvas ready for delivery "within 21 - 28 days".¹³ The purchaser could choose the size. Although 'Werner' is not listed among their twenty most popular artists, 'his' picture is one of those advertised in its on-line catalogue.¹⁴

When Eli Kellner donated his father's picture nearly forty years ago these 'Chinese factories' making ready-made old masters to order did not exist. Be that as it may, the Beth Midrash Morasha Arthur's Road Synagogue can still pride itself on having an originally coloured 19th Century picture of a subject that has remained as popular today as it was when the congregation first began in 1897.

NOTES

- 1 SA Rochlin, Jubilee of Cape Town's Oldest "Minyan", *SA Jewish Times*, 19.12.1947
- 2 Elia Stamm, 'Friendly Intimacy of Chasidic Shul in Cape Town', (un-named undated newspaper cutting on Arthurs Road website)
- 3 Philip Goldman A Brief History of our Shul; History | Beit Midrash Morasha @ Arthurs Road www.morasha.co.za/about-us/history/

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- 4 E-mail from Bubbles Segal, 15.11.2014
- 5 This photo and the following one is taken by Roydon Sacks
- 6 Antique Oil Painting, 'Rabbis Arguing Talmud' (Hebert, Ernest?) (French, 1817-) Judaica Jewish in Art, Art from Dealers & Resellers, Paintings | eBay. www.ebay.com.au/itm/371079151219 oil on Canvas, 'Rabbis In Heated Discussion', (Hebert ...www.ebay.co.uk > ... > Other Contemporary Paintings)
- 7 B. Werner | Art auction results, prices and artworks estimates www.arcadja.com > Arcadja Auctions > Artists Database Werner B, 'Rabbis in a Debate', Auction House: Christie's/Sep 13, 2006. Estimate: € 1,478.09 - € 2,217.13. Price: € 9,755.46
- 8 For example the Thieme-Becker and Vollmer Künstlerlexikon (1907-1950)
- 9 "For while they, as new technicians seeking light and complementaries and values, deplored the spiritless and uninspired 'oliographs' of their academical contemporaries, they completely overlooked the deeper truth; their artistic instincts were not strong enough to make them see that the spiritless and uninspired subject picture was the most poignant proof that could be found of the fact that mankind no longer possessed, to any passionate or intense degree, that which made the subject picture possible--that is to say, a profound faith in something greater and more vital either than the artists themselves or their art, something which gave not only art but also life a meaning and a purpose", Vincent Van Gogh: *The Letters of a Post-Impressionist Being the Familiar Correspondence of Vincent Van Gogh...* Boston and New York Houghton Mifflin Company 1913 Chiswick Project Gutenberg www.gutenberg.org/files/40393/40393-8.txt Released as an EBook August 2, 2012
- 10 Available in the Gitlin Library
- 11 Obsidian Wings: Doctor Science, Redeeming God in Canaan, obsidianwings.blogspot.com, 29 July, 2012 <http://www.typepad.com/services/trackback/6a00d834515c2369e2017743c215a9970d445x276>
- 12 "Have your own handmade oil painting reproduction from these popular subjects"... 1st Art Gallery, 1st Art Gallery Inc, 244 5th Avenue, Suite D-230, New York, N.Y with branches in London and Panama. The sizes range from 20 x 16 inches for \$212.79 to 150 x 100 inches for \$3780.51
- 13 B. Werner, A Difference Of Opinion - 1st-Art-Gallery. com www.1st-art-gallery.com/B.-Werner/A-Difference-Of-Opinion.html
- 14 These are Leonardo da Vinci, Van Gogh, Monet, Bouguereau, Gustav Klimt, Rembrandt, Cézanne, El Greco, Toulouse Lautrec, Delacroix, Renoir, Botero, Turner, Michelangelo, Raphael, Goya, John William Waterhouse, Velazquez, Winslow Homer and John Singer Sargent



Carl Schleicher, 'Jewish scene', oil on panel

THE DYBBUK AND GEORGE GERSHWIN

*

Cecil Bloom

It is possible that one of the great operatic masterpieces of the 20th Century would not have been written had its composer obtained the performing rights to a play that he wanted to use as a subject for another opera. This could have been the fate of *Porgy and Bess* had George Gershwin succeeded in getting the rights to *The Dybbuk*, the Yiddish play written by Solomon Rappoport (better known as S. Ansky) some years before composing *Porgy and Bess*. *The Dybbuk*, also entitled *Between Two Worlds*, is probably the most famous of all Yiddish plays. It was a great success from its first performance in Warsaw by the Vilna Troupe in 1920, a month after Ansky's death and it has since been performed in many other countries, including Germany, England, the US, Ukraine, Sweden, Bulgaria and France. Its New York premiere was in September 1921, a Hebrew version was later provided by Hayim Nahman Bialik and a Yiddish film was produced in 1937. In 1968, a Hebrew version was produced, with a musical score written by one of Israel's leading composers, Noam Sheriff.

A *dybbuk* in Jewish folklore is the restless soul of a deceased person that tries to enter a living person's body. On taking over a person's body, it talks through his mouth and controls his behaviour. Ansky's play is about the love of two young people, Chonon, a poor Talmudic student, and Leah, who are betrothed to each other at a young age only for Leah's father to break the agreement and arrange for her to marry a rich young man instead. Chonon invokes the mystical powers of the *kabbalah* before he dies and, as Leah is about to be married, his spirit enters her body. Possessed by this *dybbuk*, she speaks his words in his voice. Chonon cries out that he has come to claim her as his own. Leah's father asks the rabbi to exorcise this evil spirit, and he succeeds in doing so. However, Chonon has the last word as he takes Leah's soul from her body to be united with him in death.

Cecil Bloom, a veteran contributor to Jewish Affairs, is a former technical director of a multinational pharmaceutical firm in the UK. His essays on Jewish themes relating to music, literature, history and Bible have also appeared in *Midstream* and *Jewish Quarterly*.

In 1926, Gershwyn considered the possibility of writing a full-scale opera after reading Du Bose Heyward's novel *Porgy*, which he believed had operatic potential, but did not follow up on this. In December the previous year, he had seen *The Dybbuk* at a New York theatre, where it was being performed by the famous *Habima* troupe. It impressed him so much that later, in October 1929, he wrote to a friend saying that he was thinking very much about setting it as an opera. Otto Kahn, a banker who financed musicals, became very keen on his doing this. Two days later, a newspaper headline announced, "Gershwin shelves jazz to do opera". He sketched out some musical ideas, some of which were believed to have Jewish characteristics. One was a slow, hypnotic rhythm similar to synagogue chants, which is in itself is interesting as Gershwyn does not appear to have gone to a *shul* service since his boyhood. He showed his friend Isaac Goldberg (who was also his first biographer) some of his *dybbuk* themes, and Goldberg recognised them as Jewish prayer music and a *chassidic* dance. He even planned to go to Europe to study Jewish folk and liturgical music. This was followed up by his signing a provisional contract with the Metropolitan Opera Association for an opera to be entitled *The Dybbuk*, to be performed in April 1931. But the whole project collapsed when Gershwin found he was unable to obtain the performing rights to the play because they had been awarded to an Italian composer from Turin, one Lodovico Rocca. This being the case, *Porgy and Bess* became the next realistic proposition.

In all, Rocca wrote five operas of which *Il Dibuk*, his third, is considered to be his finest and which at one time was thought to be a splendid successor to Puccini's *Turandot*. Why he chose this Yiddish drama as a subject is unclear. He had apparently seen a performance by the legendary Vilna Troupe, which performed only in Yiddish, when they toured Europe in the early 1920s. It is unlikely that he himself was Jewish. Throughout World War II, he was Director of the Turin Conservatory, not a post for a Jew. His name does appear on a Nazi list of banned composers but it is generally believed that he was banned because of his having composed *Il Dibuk*, not because he was a

Jew. Rocca's librettist, Renato Simoni was also unlikely to have been Jewish – during the war he was editor of an important Italian newspaper.

Il Dibuk, a three-act opera with a prologue sung in Italian, was first performed in March 1934 at Milan's *La Scala* theatre. The *Jewish Chronicle* (London) reported on its good reception there. It then played in Turin, Rome and Warsaw before moving to the United States, now in English translation. In May 1936, it first appeared in Detroit and then Chicago prior to performance at New York's Carnegie Hall. Detroit's audience lauded the work but the famed critic Olin Downes, in his *New York Times* review, criticised it heavily as a work that abounded in banalities, with Jewish tunes being used in a pseudo-Jewish manner. He was critical of the tenor playing Chonon, whom he wrote "struggled manfully with his role and almost succeeded in out-shouting the musical instruments" (although he acknowledged the performance to have been "earnest and painstaking"). Downes admired Ansky's play as a wonderful drama but did not believe that Rocca had any feel for a subject that was "clothed in artificiality and pretence". Gershwin apparently did not attend any performance of the opera – surprisingly, in view of his previous interest in the play.

Ansky's original play has never lost its popularity and some writers have used its basic plot in their own versions of the drama. Julia Pascal's 1992 production is part of a Holocaust trilogy. Its central character is a British Jewess who conceives of an Eastern European ghetto where five Jews debate issues of love and death as well as invoking the *kabbalah* before being sent to Auschwitz. The *dybbuk* fable is encapsulated within the play.

Hanna Krall's 2003 Warsaw production has a boy as the *dybbuk* murdered in the Warsaw ghetto but whose father eventually reaches America where another son is born and the *dybbuk* appears before the boy.

The *dybbuk* theme has also been used as a subject in music. The most important is that of a ballet choreographed by Jerome Robbins with music by Leonard Bernstein. It premiered in New York in 1974, although Robbins had considered the subject as early as 1948. Robbins and Bernstein did intend it to be ready to commemorate Israel's 25th *Yom Ha'atzmaut*. Hebrew texts interspersed throughout the ballet are sung by a tenor and baritone. Later, Bernstein arranged two orchestral suites from his music, the first featuring two vocalists and the second only instrumental. Robbins was never satisfied with his ballet and revised it three times, eventually changing its title to *Suite of Dances*. Other ballets based on the *dybbuk* story have been choreographed, one using music by Joel Engel that was used in the original performances of the play as well as music composed by Arnold Schoenberg. Engel's incidental music used many old Jewish melodies and was later entitled *Suite of the Dybbuk Legend*.

It was some time following his plans for an opera based on Ansky's play before Gershwin turned to *Porgy and Bess*. This eventually premiered in New York on 10 October 1935. But would he have turned to *Porgy* had he won the rights to *The Dybbuk* and even if he had, would he have been able to finish it before his tragically early death in 1937? It would surely have been a tragedy for opera lovers had *Porgy and Bess* never seen the light of day, but imagine what might have come instead - a real Jewish opera!



George Gershwin, 1898-1937

MY OTHER FATHER

*

Maurice Skikne

Jack – or ‘Jeck’ as my maternal Bobba called him – was tall and bordering on slim, black as the proverbial Ace of Spades. Hair already streaked with grey, no one knew his age, nor did he himself know it. Jeck was Bobba’s Man Friday, almost part of the family. Being the general factotum, he literally ran the house, cleaning and keeping it tidy. He was also the gardener, planting flowers and vegetables and watering almost daily in the summers.

Jeck was a Zulu, born and bred in Natal. In later years, he told me how as a youngster he had migrated to Johannesburg to earn big money. Somehow, my Bobba engaged him and they went on to make up a great team. When I was barely a month old, my parents came to stay at Bobba and Zaida as boarders until they could afford their own home. They had just established their own business in Power Street, Brakpan, using their wedding present money as starter capital. As was common with recent Jewish immigrants (as was my Dad), it was an African trading store, functioning as an eating house and selling various basic commodities to the black laborers on the mines.

Bobba ran a little *gesheft* (business) in the back yard. There, she bred chickens and sold eggs as well as making cottage cheese. Of course Jeck ‘managed’ the poultry, which also included geese and turkeys, each type in separate fowl runs. Bobba and Zaida spoke English quite well, having arrived well before the outbreak of World War I. They had been married in Dusatos, Lithuania. Zaida also spoke a fairly fluent IsiZulu, which he needed in order to converse with his customers. Their home was largely a happy one, with their offspring (two boys, two girls) always having suitors hanging about.

Being the first-born, I was fussed over and spoilt by doting aunts and uncles. By ten months, I was walking and talking

a while later, a boisterous tyke who was continuously getting under everyone’s feet. Jeck became my mentor, teaching me how to sweep the floors (with an old broom), and to tend to the livestock in the back yard. In addition to the poultry, Bobba also owned two cows, which Jeck would drive out to graze in the nearby veld, each day. Somehow in those days (circa 1930s), one was allowed to keep two cows in the fringes of the town, provided one kept them stabled and fed. They provided the fresh milk, and basis for making white cottage cheese for ourselves each day. Jeck was very capable of milking them, and as I grew up he taught me the technique.

There was another technique I learned from Jeck, namely the removal of freshly laid eggs from under the hens. There is a particular way of doing this, entailing using one arm to lift up the hen while reaching with the other to collect that newly-laid eggs. It did not take long to learn this method but it required speed if one was not to receive a peck from the layer. Collecting geese and turkey eggs was not easy because, being much larger birds they required strength to lift them. One also had to beware of their sheer aggression. Bobba had taught Jeck (whom I now began to call *Baba* = Father) the process of curdling the milk to make cottage cheese. This was accomplished by collecting the curdles into linen flour bags and stringing the bags on a line to allow all the water to drip out. As they solidified, the curdles fermented into cheese. These, as well lots of eggs, were sold by my Grannie to a list of ready neighbors.

Brakpan homes seldom had electric stoves. In our home, a coal stove in the kitchen was used to cook, bake and heat water for washing and keeping it going was another of Jeck’s tasks. Coal was cheap then. It was mined in the nearby collieries and distributed once weekly by an elderly Yid, who also delivered kindling wood. Being newly established, Brakpan also did not boast water-borne sewage, so the toilets were outside and the sewage collected daily by municipal employees. It was only during World War II that the conversion to a waterborne system was devised and installed.

Bobba ran a kosher home, although it

*Maurice Skikne, a frequent contributor to Jewish Affairs, has for many years been a student mentor and consultant at Johannesburg universities. He is chairman of the Jewish Genealogical Society of South Africa. A review of his recently-published book *The Social History of the Brakpan Jewish Community* will appear in a forthcoming issue of Jewish Affairs.*

was difficult in those times. Fridays were devoted to cooking *Tsolent* and baking pleated *Challes* as well as *Bulkes* for *Shabbosim*. My personal treat each Friday was to make and roll some of the dough using a board and rolling pin, like Bobba did and then loading them into the oven. My reward - a hot *Bulke*, to be eaten once cooled down. Jeck, being the factotum, had learned how to do some of these tasks. Removal from the oven was one of them, utilizing a spatula and laying the bread on wooden boards and covering them.

During his leisure time, Jeck attended to his own little enterprises. These were entertaining female and male friends in his 'Kyaiah', which stood proudly in the backyard. Attired in a grey shirt and baggy, well-worn grey trousers, and never wearing shoes, summer or winter, he would go about his tasks. It was only when the dead of winter dictated it that he would don a cardigan, knitted by one of his female friends. But he also made two products, snuff and rolled cigarettes, which he sold to neighboring servants. At night, they would descend en masse and African music would blare from his room, played on windup gramophones on wax records (of which he had a largish collection). Jeck had three gramophones, of which the newest was highly treasured and used only on rare occasions like public holidays.

Manufacturing snuff (called 'gwai') was a special technique. Once a week, Jeck would repair to the nearby African medicine shop and buy his supply of dried tobacco leaf bundles as base material. Snuff was made with broken-up tobacco leaf and ash from the stove, mixed together in a cast iron pestle and mortar and stamped until the mixture reached the correct consistency. This powder, slightly dampened with water, was then loaded into an old biscuit tin. Each customer would bring his own little tin, and loaded up. I was never sure just how the pricing worked but many times witnessed the sales.

Making cigarettes required another special technique. Here, the leaf tobacco was dampened and broken by hand into finer pieces. Precut squares of brown paper were then laid out. A small pinch of tobacco was placed in the middle of the paper and rolled into a tube, the edge licked to stick it down. Such a tube was called a 'zoll'. Once lit it exuded very strong smoke and usually elicited a coughing spasm on the first puff. Early on Jeck, would not allow me to test the *zoll* until I was around eight years old. Then one all but exploded on lighting up!

Jeck had somehow learned to read, but could not write. I picked up speaking IsiZulu from an early age and could converse pretty

well by the time I began nursery school. This has stood me in good stead all my life, even to the extent of teaching students at university and purchasing in various businesses. It has also made me respect and like the black people in this land of ours. Jeck also taught me how to sing simple Zulu songs, now long forgotten, and even how to curse and swear in that tongue! Whenever he walked down to the local Greek café, I walked with Jeck and always felt safe in his presence. When my brother Cyril was born, I accidentally swallowed a piece of cake with an almond attached at his *bris mila*, which caused acute appendicitis. On my recovery, Jeck presented me with one of his older gramophones and a few wax records! Very proudly I learnt to operate it and my father saw to its repair and supply of needles, the latter requiring replacement after playing both sides of a record.

Jack was very patient with me, going over various tasks until they were mastered. But my participation largely ended when I began at kindergarten at age four. Jeck would walk me there, just two blocks away, and come fetch me at 12:30. Even so, the two of us drifted apart, with Jeck doing his daily tasks while I became more involved with my beloved Aunt Gerty, who despite being a school-girl herself introduced me to concepts like learning to read and write. Such activities prepared me for formal school.

Jack eventually left after Bobba passed away in 1950 and the homestead was sold up, retiring to his home in Natal. Unfortunately, to my lasting regret, we lost track of him over time. I am nevertheless eternally grateful for his care and teaching, as well as for introducing me to the fascinating IsiZulu language. Almost seventy-nine years later, I can still recall those halcyon days spending time with that fine, caring man.



DENIAL: HOLOCAUST HISTORY ON TRIAL

*

Ralph Zulman

Deborah Lipstadt is currently the Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish History and Holocaust Studies at Emory University. She is the author of *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-1945* (1986), *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (1993), *History on Trial: My Day in Court with a Holocaust Denier* (2005) and *The Eichman Trial* (2011). In 2016, *History on Trial* was the subject of a major motion picture, entitled *Denial*. To coincide with its release the book, now entitled *Denial - Holocaust History on Trial*, was reissued in paperback.

In *Denying the Holocaust*, Lipstadt called David Irving “one of the most dangerous spokespersons for Holocaust denial”. Following its publication in the UK, Irving filed a libel suit against her and her publisher. She successfully defended the action with a first-rate team of lawyers, historians and experts. *Denial: Holocaust History on Trial* is a blow-by blow account of the singular legal battle that took place.

The book consists of, a Foreword, a Note to the Reader, a Prologue, 22 chapters divided into three parts (the Prelude, The Trial and the Aftermath), an Afterword by Alan Dershowitz, Acknowledgements, Notes, an Index and various photographs.

Lipstadt, whose father left Germany before the rise of the Third Reich and whose mother was born in Canada, grew up on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. Her Modern Orthodox home was “shaped by a dedication to Jewish tradition together with an appreciation of the surrounding secular society”. On a visit to Israel in 1968, she “understood the deep imprint of the Holocaust and Israel on the psyche of the Jewish people” and following

her return began graduate work in modern Jewish history at Brandeis University. She found herself increasingly drawn to the study of the Holocaust, particularly to the question of how bystanders – Jew and non-Jews - reacted.

At the request of Professors Yehuda Bauer and Israel Gutman of the Centre for the Study of Antisemitism at the Hebrew University, she began conducting a research project on Holocaust denial. As her research proceeded, she was struck by the sophisticated camouflage tactics developed by the deniers. The Institute for Historical Review in California, for instance, depicted itself as a scholarly group driven by “a deep dedication to the cause of truth in history”. Its attacks on the Holocaust (described as the ‘Greatest Lie in all of history’) had both an antisemitic and anti-Israel bias.

The general media was equally blindsided by denial. Lipstadt’s concern about deniers was escalated in 1988 when she learnt that David Irving was now publically denying the Holocaust. Although she was aware of Irving she did not pay close attention to him until 1977 when he published *Hitler’s War*, which alleged that Hitler did not know about the Final Solution. She believed that Irving’s conclusions could only have been as a result of willful distortions. A number of scholars wrote extensive critiques documenting how Irving had skewed historical evidence.

Well before becoming a denier Irving had argued that the Nazi wrongdoings were equaled, if not surpassed by Allied evils. In 1986, he told a South African audience that the British had bombed the Belgians, Poles, French and Dutch, killing millions. After the reissue *Hitler’s War* a number of leading British historians, including AJP Taylor, Hugh Trevor-Roper, Paul Addison and John Charmley praised Irving for his “indefatigable scholarly industry” but questioned his use of sources. Rainier Zitelmann, a conservative German historian, also praised Irving on his research on Hitler. However, John Lukas took

Mr Justice Ralph Zulman, a long-serving member of the editorial board of Jewish Affairs and a frequent contributor to its Reviews pages, is a former Judge of the Appeal Court of South Africa.

a different tone. He was troubled by those who praised Irving's research and challenged them to check his sources. Had they done so, he argued, they would have found that that many of the references and quotations were not verifiable and that "unconvincing assertions abound". Charles Sydnor carefully checked Irving's sources and accused him of seriously misrepresenting and distorting the record of Hitler and the Third Reich.

Lipstadt accepts that respected Holocaust historians have markedly different views about many aspects of the Holocaust, such as that of Jewish responses to the persecution. Deniers, however, falsify and pervert the historical record and consequently fall entirely outside the parameters of historical debate about the Holocaust.

Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory appeared in 1993 and received widespread critical acclaim. Lipstadt considered her scholarly work on denial closed. Then, in 1995, came a letter from Penguin, followed by additional enquiries by its lawyers about the sources on which Lipstadt's critique of Irving had been based. In September, Penguin's lawyers wrote again informing her that Irving had filed papers indicating his intention to proceed with a lawsuit against Penguin and herself.

Although both she and Penguin were being sued, Lipstadt realized that their perspectives were different. She needed someone to formulate a legal strategy to suit her interests. On the recommendation of a friend she contacted Anthony Julius, a partner in the London firm of solicitors, Mishcon de Reya. She knew him as the author of *T.S. Elliot: Anti-Semitism and Literary Form*. He was however better generally known as having acted as Princess Diana's lawyer in her divorce case. Julius was delighted to represent her. He assured her that he would act pro bono if need be as she could not afford his substantial fees. Emory University agreed to allocate \$25 000.00 to cover expenses. She received a 'crash course' in the British libel law, which presumes defamatory words to be untrue until the author proved them true. Julius assumed that Irving would drop his case. He was wrong.

Over the next few months Lipstadt's strategy evolved. It was decided that the object was not to prove that the Holocaust happened - no court needed proof of that. Her job was to prove the truth of her words, namely that Irving had lied about the Holocaust and had done so for antisemitic reasons. It was decided not to call survivors as witnesses. She did not want Irving ridiculing survivors as he had done in the past. For example in an Australian radio show he asked a survivor how much money she had made after 1945

out of the concentration tattoo on her arm.

During the summer the lawyers pored over some 1500 documents discovered by Irving.

Richard Rampton QC, one of England's leading barristers in the field of defamation, was selected to present the case. In his report Richard Evans, an expert defense witness, described Irving's works as "a knotted web of distortions, suppress and manipulations" in every single instance which he and his experts examined and that "dishonesty permeated his entire written and spoken output".

The trial commenced before Mr Justice Gray on 11 January 2000. Irving represented himself. Rampton QC began his opening address by saying: "Mr. Irving calls himself an historian. The truth is, however, that he is not an historian at all but a falsifier of history. To put it bluntly he is a liar".

Irving showed a video tape to the Court of an interview that Lipstadt had given on Australian television in which she said about Irving (then trying to obtain an Australian visa) that "no historian takes him seriously". Judge Gray tried, without much success, to get Irving to define the Holocaust. Irving insisted that he did not manipulate his sources. He concluded his remarks with the words, 'The kind of hatred that this book has subjected me to [is] something intolerable, something unspeakable and which I would wish no other person to be subjected to'.

Rampton QC began his cross-examination of Irving by noting that he had denied being a Holocaust denier. He then read from a speech Irving had given in Canada in which he said, after referring to the trial of Ernst Zundel in which he gave evidence, that the story of the Holocaust "was just a legend". Simple questions to Irving elicited long meandering responses. When asked how many innocent Jewish people the Nazis had deliberately killed Irving eventually, after shrugging his shoulders, said that he was not an expert on the Holocaust, and therefore his answer would be of no value. Rampton presented selected quotations from Irving's writings, demonstrating how he had perverted and skewed the meanings of events that he wrote about.

'The Trial' section is dealt with in chapters 5 to 19. Chapter headings include 'Exonerating Hitler', 'Excoriating the Allies', 'Lying about Hitler' and 'The Diary of Anne Frank: A Novel?'. Chapters 20-22 deal with the aftermath of the trial.

In this book, Lipstadt has shown us that "truth and justice are on our side" and that "freedom of speech is also on our side".

Denial - Holocaust History on Trial by Deborah Lipstadt, HarperCollins, 2016, 400pp

new POETRY

Heritage Month

I have this feeling now as a Jewess
That I need to use my skills as an Artist and
Poet to make myself heard Living right here in
Cape Town, South Africa.

I feel the forces of anti-Semitism creeping once
again in different, Colours, shapes and forms All
around us. Even in the institution where I learn.

I hear the people on the radio
Raving about Heritage Month
Well I am here trying my utmost to hold onto
mine.
It is my magic wand to help get me where I
want to be in this world.

There are many different heritages which make
up this society.
Many range of traditions and cultures.
We cannot all be the same.
And need to be proud and honest about who
we are.
And not hide behind the approaching gloomy
clouds, which have started gathering across Table
Mountain.

Please G-d I am able, to continue to shine, as
myself Through what's left, of the rays of the
sun, moon and star light.

Abigail Sarah Bagraim

BroKeN DoLLS

Two little girls played 'dolls' together
Carefully dressed them and gave them names
They carried them, cradled them and put them
to rest
They played no other games

Two grown-up girls
Now playing 'house'
Not with each other
But each with a spouse

Two women became mothers
To real little dolls of their own
But these they would care for forever
Even when they were fully grown
They loved them and nurtured them
And saw they were dressed
They fed them and bathed them
And put them to rest ...

... Two older women
Somehow coming through
Knowing that dolls can be broken
And dreams can be too

Two women understanding
That though they had tried their best
It was their precious, damaged dolls
That would be the ultimate test

Two women who have realised
That it is life itself that's the game
And the more we search for answers
The less there is to blame

Two people who have recognized
That we are all really puppets at best
And yet still have to learn to lay
Our broken dolls to rest

Knowing that every one of us
Is as vulnerable as each little toy
And as we bury our sadness and hurt
We are fortified by extracting the joy

Charlotte Cohen

In Muizenberg cemetery, January 2016¹

Here they are,
face up to the Capricorn sky,
biblical wanderers on heathen sand.
My clan. Who shall visit them when we are
gone?

I read the stones of the windswept acre
beneath the lowering peaks.
Muizenberg, once the world's most southerly
shtetl,
refuge from a bullying Europe.
Goldstein, Levy, Rifkin, Braude,
See the faces in the ghetto streets.
bargaining across the kosher counters,
atoning for their sins at Yom Kippur,
burying their dead.

All gone. The *mezuzahs* from the doorframes;
their homes occupied by Christians, Moslems,
all the nations of my country; at last.

Here, Grandpa Barney, in his heavy suit,
dead when I was nine.
I don't know if he wore a hearing aid
but he seemed to miss out on much that was
going on around him.
Granny and her Yorkshire sisters
called him 'the Russian'. Behind his back.

Granny. *The* woman in my life,
as we like to say of grannies. And she *was*.
Three sons, dead before they were thirty.
How could she bear the sorrow
and still offer the world that sweet smile?
As she lay dying I prayed for the last time.
I miss the old thing.

Marcus is the only son here.
I finger the words on the Table Mountain
sandstone;
'Mordechai ben Dov, died 1937'.
TB, it was said, from a kick in a rugby match.
How proud they were, these immigrants,
of their studious lawyer boy.

And a plaque for uncle Archie, Dr Archibald
Haft,
cavalier, careless; 'so many girls were interested',
mom said.
Buried in another desert far up the continent.
At war, showing up for his parents' adopted
land.

But where number three, the first born, the
violinist,
dead in a lunatic asylum?
Nothing but a blank wall when we spoke his
name.
Joshua.
Thus it was a hundred years ago.

Dad lies near the car park where, on summer
Sundays
kinsmen from London, Sydney or San Diego,
wander the menhir-lined avenues with nostalgic
eye,
pose a stone of remembrance on their namesakes -
no flowers, please, do not brighten this dreary
place -
their bored children impatient for the beach.

I hear his voice at odd moments, 'Denis,
Denis, Denis...',
as if from the grave. Is he asking where his
wife is?
For unlike the other pairings in this place,
she does not lie alongside.
Did she wish to reserve the plot next door,
they inquired.
Mom didn't ring back.
Lil and Phil; couldn't face another fifty years
in his presence,
much less an eternity.

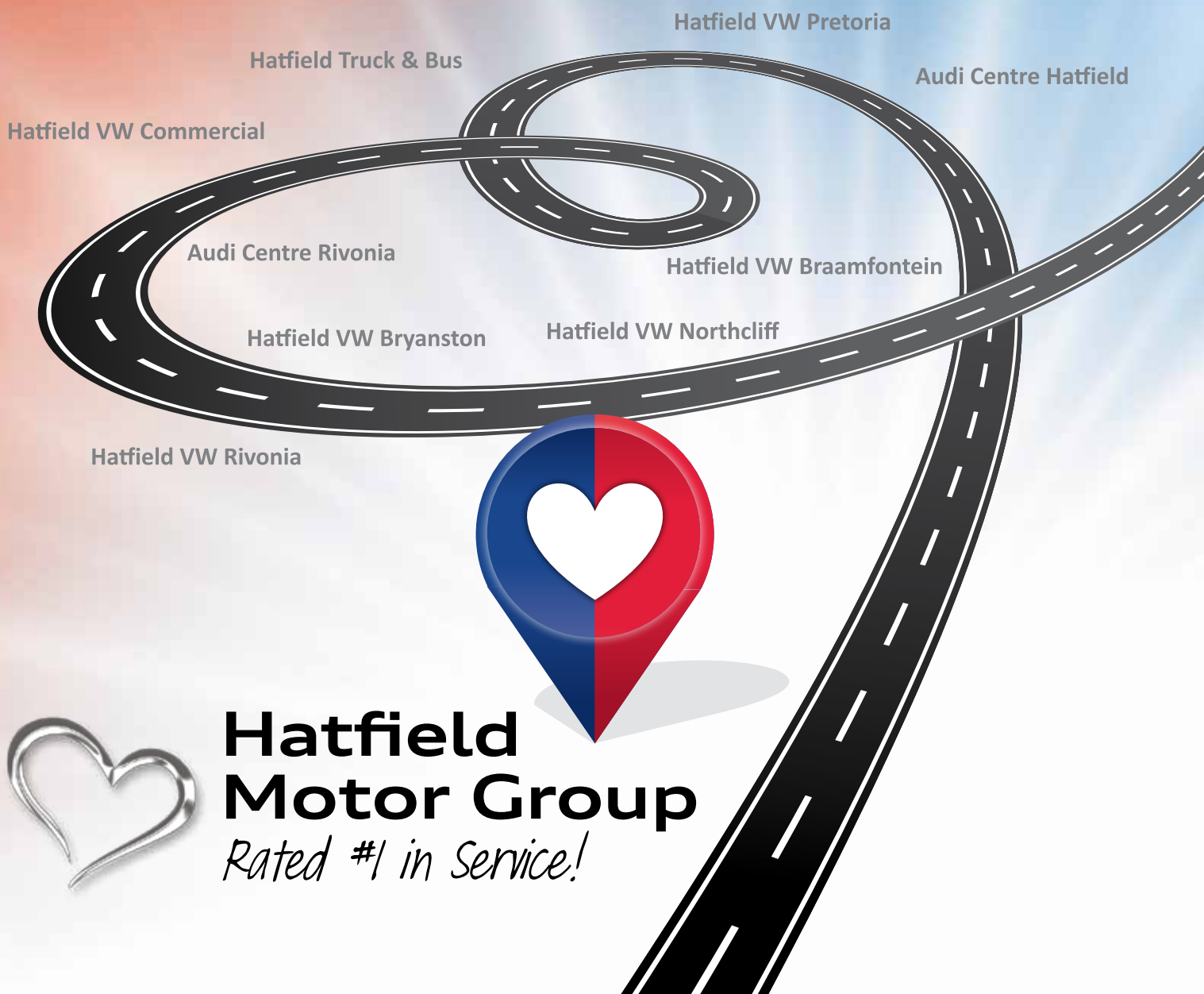
Dear Lil, no need to plant a stone, we talk
about you still.
But you didn't widow well.
'I'd like a nice, loving man to hug,' you said,
in your faded pink pyjamas,
'no funny business...just...a companion.'
You went without fuss. When the maid came in
with the Andrew's Liver Salts
a library book lay open on your chest.
The day before your 89th, it was,
though your passport said 81.

And Michael. Never Mike.
It is decided that eleven-year-old me should
not be at the funeral.
I don't say goodbye to my big *broer*,
do not shovel three clods of earth on his corpse,
do not see him covered up in his last place,
nor my father prostrate himself on the coffin
as it's lowered into the six feet.
I don't know how many and who were there,
who spoke up for his life, brief as it was but
a life all the same,
other than the rabbi delivering his form of
words.

I never cried for him.
I was ashamed to have survived.

Sad to say, I won't be joining them.
But I'll be there on the mountain top,
the peak on the left
if you stand with your back to the sea.

Denis Herbstein



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Epilogue from "Love to Hate"

A scarecrow strides across the mielie fields.
 He's a giant, head and shoulders above the green stalks,
 their hair moving softly in the early morning breeze.
 His face is gaunt, burnt, fried, almost, by the sun.
 Wild untidy wisps of long silver hair, once fair,
 stick out from under the battered felt hat, its former colour unrecognisable.
 His jeans are torn and dusty, sagging over a flat backside, scrawny thighs
 and stick legs.
 He moves from green fields to stubble,
 worn *velskoen* crunching on the dead stalks,
 pale blue eyes narrowed against the glare of the rising sun.
 His movements are jerky, agitated, mouth set in a grimace of pain.
 On and on over fields now cracked and dry,
 occasionally littered with the bones of old livestock.
 And in the distance as though following in his footsteps,
 is the skeletal black figure of Giant Death with his scythe,
 slashing at a non-existent mielie crop.

The gap narrows. Scarecrow panics, knowing his time is almost up.
 His face is wet with sweat, a greenish pallor.
 The sweat runs down his cheeks,
 darkens his white-blond beard and moustache.
 He rolls his eyes, whites showing prominently.
 Death blows his horn.

Simultaneously there're seismic upheavals from the other ends of the earth,
 the forces of nature, seething, writhing, bubbling.
 An underwater earthquake, post-Christmas day destruction.²
 Giant waves moving at an unbelievable rate, over a distance of 1600 km,
 a single wave, 160 km long, travelling at a speed of 965 km per hour.
 Inconceivable to the human mind, yet experienced – the nightmare of
 nightmares.
 Hundreds of thousands of people mowed down in its path.
 An international disaster affecting visitors from
 forty different countries, locals from fourteen different nations.
 Our man-made disasters pale into insignificance.
 Besides, it is not even man, sophisticated with technology, who pre-empt
 the cataclysm,
 but the animals including the small Asian elephants
 who trumpet, call and agitate at least five hours before the tsunami breaks.
 Then the horror of the aftermath.
 Up to ten years to pick up the pieces.
 Meanwhile children are orphaned and abducted
 and man fights the realities of cholera and starvation.
 Waves of terror and death.

Pamela Heller-Stern

NOTES

- 1 The above (author's copyright) is from a collection of Denis Herbstein's poems entitled *No one to contradict me*, Dionysus Books, 2016.
- 2 On 26 December 2004, an earthquake off the west coast of Sumatra caused massive underwater upheavals resulting in tsunamis affecting Sri Lanka, Phuket in Thailand, Banda Aceh in Indonesia, parts of India, Andaman and the Nicobar Islands.



Happy Chanukah. Let the Menorah light your way.

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colleagues the very best this Chanukah.

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Happy Chanukah. Let the Menorah light your way.

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and colleagues the very best
this Chanukah. Chag Sameach!

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